

Learning from the Masters

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Summary: [Based off the Fanfic "Nightfall" written by Le'Letha] Hiccup and Toothless have always freed their nest-mates from Viking traps, but recently several have been captured alive and carefully unharmed. They don't know what the Viking trappers want from their captive kin, but they know it's something strange, and probably something bad.

1. Chapter 1

****A/N: ****So I recently finished "Nightfall" written by Le'letha(which, you seriously HAVE to read if you haven't yet, it's really awesome. Can find it at the top of my "Favorite stories" list on my page) and I got an idea for it that I discussed a bit with them and asked if it would be okay to do my own sort of spin-off fic based off of Nightfall, so that gave rise to this.

It'll be multiple chapters but they'll probably be super short, and I don't expect this story will be all that long, but there's always a chance I'll get carried away. I'm definitely excited to try the Hiccup/Toothless POV, but I'm sure that'll be a challenge(but where's the fun without the challenge, right?) Anyway, enjoy~

****Disclaimer:****

How To Train Your Dragon belongs to Dreamworks.

Nightfall(which this is directly based off of) was written by Le'Letha. If you read this, please ALSO read her story ^_^ (you'll be very glad you did!)

My own OC's in this belong to me.

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><p>Learning from the Masters
****A How To Train Your

Dragon Fanfiction

>**Based off Le'Letha's "Nightfall"***

* * *

><p>A low rumble like thunder reverberated through the ground and the smell of dust and men and animal sweat tinged the air. The faint wind of momentum blew back brown hair and white-and-black tail alike in their wild charge that had surely unsettled every other animal in the area into fleeing far away.<p>

A hard, steady _Hfff Hfff Hfff _from a large, flared nose blew small clouds of breath back into his face that quickly mingled with the rest of the heavy fog that cloaked the ground. Others sounded behind in a low thrum, just beneath the sound of galloping hooves.

Blue eyes never left the figure ahead for even a second, maintaining just enough distance to keep the beast from whirling around and attacking, but not enough that it could escape. Let it think it could outrun them. He was patient, and more importantly, he had planned on exactly this scenario.

The dragon screeched its fury back at the small hoard of pursuers as it sprinted, wings tucked to its sides rather than spread to fly, but not voluntarily. A long bolas was tangled around its body, pinning its wings and leaving its only mode of flight to run, or to turn around and fight if it tired of the chase.

A rock sling provided a quick cure for that idea however, occasionally pausing to whirl it overhead and let a stone fly, pelting the dragon's hide mostly harmlessly, but startle it into continuing to run with a howl of alarm and lashing its tail to throw off an attacker it thought must be right behind it.

When the dragon strayed from the path they wanted it to follow, another man on horseback cut off its escape, steering it this way or that, into the waiting maw of a steep ravine. Alternate paths were blocked, giving it little choice than to head deeper into the trap.

Having decided they had come far enough, and not wanting this to drag on any longer than it had to, the head rider swung another bolas overhead and let it fly, tangling the dragon's legs and bringing it down hard.

The beast screamed and wrestled desperately, tail lashing furiously to snare anything dumb enough to come too close.

Panting, huffing horses came dancing to a stop, men finding their own feet.

"Secure that tail," the lead rider commanded, walking wide around the fighting dragon. It snarled a panicked warning at him, seconds before blasting fire he was already prepared for, leaping and rolling, back to his feet, and lunging.

Fangs snapped at him. He all but leapt onto its head, his weight forcing its jaw shut. His brows furrowed in concentration as it squirmed, wanting to bite and tear him, or smolder him into ash. Perhaps both.

"Muzzle it!" he ordered to those who were not already busy restraining the tail and rest of its body. Leather straps and metal buckles were brought over, securing them over the monster's head so it could neither bite nor spew flames, all but entirely secured.

He let the dragon's head go and straightened up, staring at it and the handiwork of his hunters appreciatively. This dragon was a nice specimen, fit and strong. It would do well for what he had in mind for it, for however long they had it.

Blue eyes slid to his men, many of them waiting on his orders, despite that he was of the smallest build between all of them and one of the youngest.

"Retrieve the cart. We take this one back with us as well." The Norsemen that surrounded him immediately jumped to do as they were told without hesitation. He wasn't entirely fooled by their willingness to work and follow commands, however.

Certainly, they thought this idea to be crazy. Idealistic, intuitive, and creative, certainly, but just as crazy as all those other things. Even his father had been skeptical, thinking this idea of his was somewhat foolish, but perhaps unique and unexpected enough to work.

Both of his parents had often said he was ahead of his peers even as a child, thinking of things beneficial to not only their tribe's survival, but enhancement, that no one else before him had even fathomed. Everyone was often wary of his strange thoughts and the things he came up with, but none doubted that he would make a great Chief exactly because of it.

To him, what others failed to see seemed so obvious. While they had been unable to fathom coming to the conclusion he had, he had trouble fathoming how they hadn't.

Dragons were a nuisance for all of those under the Viking name. That was a matter of fact. Most of the pain of dealing with dragons was for mainly two reasons; fire and flight. Flight was the most troublesome out of the two, because how could you kill or fight off something you couldn't even reach?

In all retrospect, his tribe was lucky. Dragons were only the rare minor nuisance, though he had heard other tribes had far worse luck, even being wiped out entirely by dragons in some areas. What they lacked in dragon troubles though, they earned back in warfare with other tribes. That was far more troublesome.

The idea had first come to him when he was young, but now he was fully realizing that dream. If something as big as a dragon could fly, then surely so could they. The thought was tantalizing, and the tactical advantage over other tribes was deeply motivating to make it a reality.

Making it reality was the trick, though.

With reluctance, his father had granted him a knar and his own crew of nineteen to accompany him on this "expedition" of his. He could not spare any more with the constant threat of other tribes ready to

wipe them all out at any opportunity.

The other Vikings brought a flat cart from further down the canyon and loaded the dragon onto it, tying it down with chains. It hissed and growled at them with nervous anger, but it went unheeded.

Their work was interrupted with a roar that didn't belong to their captured specimen however, another one appearing as they were hitching some of the horses up.

Someone barked a warning, "Dragon!" that had everyone scrambling for either a weapon or a sling. The beast snarled and flew downward, aiming for the one chained down, likely a mate or sibling to it, but was pelted back by a shower of stones and brandished weapons before ever getting close, and then narrow space of the canyon provided little room to maneuver.

The captured dragon whined and howled, the two beasts chattering to each other. With a frustrated caterwaul, the newly arrived one wheeled around and disappeared into the sky hurriedly, easily repelled. Men cheered victoriously and waved their weapons as though taunting it, celebrating their easy win, but the younger Chief's son was silent in observation as he watched it flee.

"Do not celebrate too soon," he warned, the noise dying down slightly, his words met with confused looks. "It might only be going for help. Hurry up, and move this dragon back to our camp. If it does plan to return, let's not give it the chance to find us still here."

There was a moment of doubt, some looking as though they wanted to argue, but they obeyed and carried out their work solemnly. None of them were dumb enough to question his caution, not wanting to face more dragons just to defend one if it really did plan to return with the rest of its nest.

2. Chapter 2

****A/N:**** This was definately not easy to write but I'm hoping that it came out at least somewhat decently lol Enjoy~

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><p>Learning from the Masters
****A How To Train Your Dragon Fanfiction
>**Based of Le'Letha's "Nightfall"***

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><p>It has been many days and nights that some of Hiccup and Toothless' nest-mates have gone missing where no one has seen.<p>

Sometimes dragons left the nest and didn't return because they did not wish to, but most of the time, it was because they were old and tired or sick bad sick and soon to die and did not want death to snap its jaws on its other nest-mates.

Other times they did not mean to stay away but something hunted them

and won, but such a thing was rare unless it was an enemy dragon that was strong and wouldn't settle for peace.

And then there were _pfikingr _humans who hunted and trapped their kind. Traps were nothing new to the dragons. _Pfikingr _and dragons had been enemies forever, and the dragon pair had been freeing their nest-mates from them with Hiccup's skilled paws as long as both could remember. Many times they disabled traps before most could even be sprung, the other dragons finding and telling them where to go when they spotted nasty traps that wanted to bite or snare or tangle.

The strange disappearances were making many dragons worried and scared. None of the dragons that had gone missing were old or _sick bad sick_. Most were young and strong and some even had hatchlings to watch.

Some dragons had reported traps, but they could not find their lost nest-mates, not even a lingering scent near any of the traps, and in some places, even human stink was stale and almost non-existent, like they had forgotten their traps and the dragons they had meant to catch.

Already the morning and noon had been spent with many dragons searching as they hunted and patrolled their nest-territory. Hiccup and Toothless had wanted to search as well, worried for their lost friends, but Cloudjumper was wary to let them leave far without knowing what was making their nest-mates vanish, only to check that there were no dangers close to the nest.

Once they had assured that nothing threatened to come inside, they'd busied themselves with hearing other dragons report nothing unusual, and then try to console a nest of hatchlings that chirped and wailed for their parents. They were not among the hatchlings whose mother or father had not come back, but even they were knowing of what was happening and frightened for any length of time they were left alone while the pair hunted.

Dragons didn't normally leave hatchlings all alone. It was unnatural. One of the pair always stayed while the other hunted, but many pairs recently were unsettled and not sure to go alone, especially if they had to fight off whatever bad thing wanted to take dragons away. Most left now in small crowds until they were sure they were safe, but every so often a pair would leave together.

Safe safe no sad back soon no scared safe no sad soon back you see, Hiccup crooned as the hatchlings crowded around him chattering their unrest and need for their parents, needing something to cling to â€" which just so happened to be him and Toothless.

He continued to warble little comforts and reassurances to the little ones who would not be comforted until their mother returned.

After a time, a recognizable screech of alarm made the two and many other dragons look up as one of the pair returned in a flurry of wings. The hatchlings instantly forgot Hiccup and Toothless to crowd around him as he landed, looking tired as though he had flown a long way too fast, bristling.

They had been able to tell already when he had entered without his mate that something wasn't right.

Where mate where go mate gone where bad gone where?

_Human! _the dragon hissed, who they knew as Sharksnatcher. _Bad human bad chase trap take gone trap Skydropper gone bad human chase trap take gone!_

Hiccup was already on Toothless' back and the fly-with by the time Sharksnatcher had finished chattering. _Pfikingr _were something they could _easily _handle and they were _not _going to let another one of their nest-mates be taken and hurt and killed and another flock of hatchlings to lose their mother.

Where go we fly we find Skydropper we go where go bad human where?

Sharksnatcher took to the air and they followed, though Sharksnatcher was tired and slow from already flying so far and so fast but they could not find the _pfikingr _and Skydropper without so they had to go only as fast as Sharksnatcher could.

They soared over waves and past sea fangs of stone and small islands with prey-things and other dragons even after the sun went down. Sharksnatcher finally set down on the shore of a forested island to rest his wings, and seemed nervous to continue on the ground into the forest.

Why no go scared why bad human there not go bad danger ahead?

Sharksnatcher bristled uncertainly and eyed the woods with caution, chattering nervously.

Bad danger bad human fast danger prey-no-prey-things hunt fast chase confused scared fast uncertain chase trap bad human fly-with preynoprey-things chase hunt danger fly safe ground no safe danger.

Hiccup and Toothless exchanged a look with each other and couldn't help but share Sharksnatcher's nervousness at such a strange idea.

A prey-thing that _hunted _dragons? _Pfikingr _that ran with hunting preynoprey-things on a fly-with? They had never heard of such a ridiculous notion! It simply couldn't be. _Pfikingr _were slow and stupid and weak and couldn't chase dragons because dragons are fast and clever and strong and could fly and breath flames as well as run. That's why _pfikingr_ needed slow, hidden traps and to be sneaky to catch them with things that bit and tangled and wouldn't let go, and why they had to make sharp fang-things out of metals that they weren't born with like powerful and mighty dragons with fangs and claws.

It was night, though, and _pfikingr _and even most other dragons were bad at seeing in the dark, and the forest was very dark, and Hiccup and Toothless were both very good at seeing even when others couldn't so they were not so worried about _preynoprey-things _that chased or _pfikingr _that ran with them on a fly-thing and they still had their wings if either of them tried to chase and kill them and fire to fight with and they were both _very fast _on the ground and even faster in the sky.

_Safe go we go fly if danger find Skydropper we go find her careful quiet safe, _the dragon-boy and companion agreed. Sharksnatcher was not so ready to agree but crept into the cover of the trees with reluctance, leading the way.

Many small prey-things rattled in the woods or the trees, scared by the prowling dragons, but no hunting _preynoprey-things _or _pfikingr _to worry about as they had first feared. Even their scent was gone and old and washed away, reassuring them that there was not something to fear in the trees.

The forest became bare rock that stretched above with a narrow path between that was small enough for a dragon to walk with wings in but not fly through well.

Sharksnatcher refused to walk through, wings rested enough now to take to the air, and they soared over it. The path in the rocks cut deep and long, making a path, like trails made by wood-bugs that made their nests in dead trees and ate tunnels all through it.

_Here here mate trap chase here, _Sharksnatcher crowed, landing on a ledge above the ravine, the two young dragons landing next to him and peering down into the dim light. _Gone Skydropper gone sad hurt lonely sad gone where gone?_

They settled down and watched to see if any _preynoprey-things _or _pfikingr _came through, wary of a trap, but the night was silent and still.

_Curious wary trap maybe wary alert trap question go no go? _they warbled uncertainly, before starting a slow, cautious crawl over the edge and hovered down to the ground. They listened and watched for danger but nothing moved or made noise other than Sharksnatcher chattering _nervous careful careful wary trap maybe yes trap careful_ and neither felt as though something watched and hunted, so they cautiously moved forward.

There were no traps that they could see or smell or hear, but they _could _smell the stink of humans and something else they had never smelled before that was probably the _preynoprey-thing_s that they had been warned about and strange paw-prints and long marks like something small but heavy dragged to make tracks and faint scent of dragon nest-kin.

_Follow we hunt follow you watch warn danger warn watch we follow hunt find pfikingr preynoprey-thing, _they called softly to Sharksnatcher as they began tracking the trail from the ground cautiously, careful not to make noise and silencing their chatter to hunt.

_Yes yes watch warn danger watch yes careful alert watch wary, _Sharksnatcher agreed, keeping an eye on the two and following from above, keeping vigil to warn them of danger they might not see.

The tracks and scent continued for some time and grew stronger in human and _preynoprey-thing _scent as they went, both dragons becoming more wary of their surroundings as they went.

What it led to was the large, open mouth of a cave where a glow

flickered from inside. They knew without getting closer that it was the light of fires but mingling with the scent of smoke and flame was also the rancid stink of humans.

Without sound, both had already decided to fly above the stone and look for another way in where they might not be seen.

Toothless spotted what looked to be a promising entrance and dove in, Hiccup trusting his judgment without question. It was a suitable perch, landing carefully in near perfect silence and crawling forward onto a perfect, hidden overhang where they could see everything.

The pfikingr had made the cave into a nest for their small flock, having set up many of their strange things around a large fire while some made loud noises and ran and pounced around each other in a crazy raucous and others sat on long things made of wood and metal and some of them holding strange pfikingr foods that he recognized because he sometimes stole them to taste in the past.

There were also strange things he and his other self had never seen before. Tall, short-furred prey-things with long fur on their butts and hanging in their eyes and down their neck. They were big creatures, at least about as big as his own Toothless-beloved but without wings or a long tail. How did such a creature stay balanced with no wings or tails? It must be just as clumsy of a beast as the pfikingr were. Surely such a creature couldn't chase or hunt a dragon!

Some of the strange preynoprey-thing's seemed to hear or smell their presence and Tt-(click)-th-puh-ss both became tense as the creatures shifted and angled their ears and flared their nose and looked for their hiding place before a pfikingr distracted and touched them and let the two-who-are-one relax again.

He saw the flying-with things that Sharksnatcher had warned of somewhere to the side of the cave-nest, but none on the strange preynoprey's, and larger than the one he put on Toothless-love.

As they continued to look, though, they could see none of their kin. There were big pfikingr things to the side where it grew somewhat dark though, looking somewhat like cages that some trappers used to keep live dragons they caught and stop them from getting away or fighting.

There dragons there maybe yes flock there maybe could be? They wondered quietly. If they were traps keeping members of his flock trapped than he could make easy work to free them, but they couldn't be sure. There weren't many pfikingr if it came to a fight. Concepts like counting and numbers weren't a concept for either to care about, but there were only twenty of them or so to account for had he had the concept of counting, and even less of the preynoprey-things, not many at all.

His trapped nest-mates that he was sure were kept alive though might be in danger if they rushed in too blindly, because pfikingr were bad and wanted dragons dead and would hurt or kill his kin or him and his Toothless-self without caring for their pain if they were made angry and he did not know where his nest-mates were or if they'd

find them or if they were still alive or if traps waited for them to come so they could snare them.

_Pfikingr _were sneaky creatures with their traps but
Tt-(click)-th-puh-ss could be sneaky and patient too and if they waited maybe the _pfikingr _got tired and had to sleep like dragons did and if they did then they could sneak by and free their nest-mates and maybe catch the _bad pfikingr_ and the _preynoprey-things _by surprise like the _good great sneaky _hunters that they were.

So they settled down and they waited and when the _pfikingr _were sleepy and unaware they'd pounce and catch them and free their friends from the _bad pfikingr traps_.

3. Chapter 3

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><p>Alekt gave a last, appreciative pat to Sangrida's shoulder and left the mare's side to return to one of the roughly put-together feasting tables.<p>

Around him, the men danced a drunken off-beat step and sung their jollies into the night, echoing off the cave walls. Others were less rowdy, preferring to sit and eat as they told each other accounts of their valor against rival tribes and exaggerated war stories from their youth.

It was an older man with a greying beard that he chose to sit with, a few odd lines to his face where hair refused to grow in the wake of several long scars that crossed his nose, lips, and chin at an angle.

"The horses are restless," Alekt reported softly under his breath as he came to sit, picking bread and cheese from his plate and taking a bite of each. When the tame crow on his shoulder croaked demandingly, he broke off a crumb for it to devour, every other piece going to it. "I think we are watched."

The grizzled man glanced at him and took a swig from his tankard, droplets of mead catching on his beard like morning dew.

"And have you got an idea as to what we might be watched by?"

"I couldn't be certain," Alekt shrugged slightly. "It could be spies from another tribe. 'could be a dragon waiting to pounce."

The older male nodded his head slowly. "Seems a bit odd to me that a dragon would only watch and not pounce by now. Dragons aren't the most restrained creatures I've ever had the displeasure of meeting."

Alekt nodded his head slightly, his blue eyes wandering from beneath brown bangs without moving his head. They first scoured the shadows

on the ground, but he couldn't make out movement or a shape of anything that hadn't already been there before. They traveled upwards, but it was hard to make out anything in the darkness of the cave's ceiling, where the firelight didn't quite reach.

If something was watching them or waiting to strike, it was well hidden.

"The horses could have simply caught a carried scent on the wind," he murmured, though he wasn't sure he believed the idea. "Still, it pays to be cautious."

"Aye," the man nodded. "It's good instincts. Many a man lacking them has lost his life for being none the wiser." He paused to grumble incoherency in the back of his throat and wipe lingering beads of liquid from his lips. "So, what do you want to do about it? Should we raise the alarm?"

"No," Alekt hummed slowly. "I don't think that will be necessary. Tell the other men that we might have company soon and to be ready if anything appears, but not to change anything they are doing now. If we are indeed watched, then whatever it is, it's smart enough to hide and wait, so it's probably smart enough to notice if we all go on the alert," he decided. "Whoever they are, let them think they can catch us unawares. We'll have the advantage before they even know we do."

The man nodded, easily able to appreciate the well-calculated forethought that came so easily to the young man, where others might be quick to pick up an ax before even knowing if they'd need it.

"I'll be sure it gets passed along," the grey-bearded man assured, rising from his seat and moving to join the group that sat telling stories as if to casually join them.

Alekt returned to eating, another short caw sounding in his ear impatiently and beak nibbling sociably at his lip. He nibbled back and uttered a low warble of affection in return, before distracting it with another offering of food from his palm.

* * *

><p>The festivities faded as the night wore on, not long after Alekt had sent a message along to be prepared for potentially hostile intruders. The songs, stories, and drunken shenanigans were tossed aside earlier than most had probably originally planned in favor of turning for bed.<p>

Many settled down with a weapon ready at their side, though it was hardly a first and wouldn't be the last time a Norseman slept with a hand still on their sword or ax.

He himself bundled into a blanket of wool and fur on his side, one eye cracked faintly open towards the opposite side of the cave where the covered cages sat. At his side rested a crossbow, just beneath the folds of his blanket, ready to fire if anything showed itself after all.

Soon the only sound that could be heard was the faint crackle of the

fire in the middle of the cave, which they had stoked before turning in for the night, and the occasional huff of half-asleep horses further to the side. Nothing stirred, not even the men, some who truly weren't awake " as was apparent by the low snores " and some who were lying in wait for an enemy to appear just as he was.

Then he heard a soft, nervous, equine nicker and a shuffling of hooves, thinking he saw something, faintly, from the shadows on the opposite end. Something moving, though slowly, and near-perfectly blended with the backdrop of shadow-cast rocks. Something big.

_Changewing, maybe? _he wondered curiously to himself. That would be problematic. Changewings were tricky dragons to deal with, on account they could almost appear to turn invisible, with how they changed their colors and shapes.

He quickly dashed the idea, though. Changewings weren't a local species, and this creature didn't move like one. Changewings moved like lizards, in side-to-side leg motions. This one prowled like a large cat on the hunt, stretching long and forward, like pumas he had seen in the far northern mainland, but it was too large to be a wild cat and too dark in coloration, light reflecting the faintest ebony sheen of a night-black form.

For a moment, it melted perfectly into the shadows, disappearing like a phantom. He waited for several minutes before he was rewarded by the silhouette of the beast appearing again, slowly. He could make out a pair of large, cat-like eyes, but too large to simply be a feline. He could almost guess that they were green or gold, but it was hard to tell.

It placed a paw forward, stopped, and waited. Watching. Listening.

When it seemed satisfied that its presence was unnoticed, it took another step forward, and another.

Alekt was steadily making out some of its features. It was a dragon, but small, in the way of most dragons. What it lacked in overall girth though, it made up for in sleek compactness and a sturdy build. Tucked close to its body were a pair of long wings and other fins on its tail.

It wasn't a species he had ever seen before. Apparently someone else had though as he heard a very faint, barely audible, hissed, _"Night Fury_".

He had heard plenty of stories. Every Norseman from the western mainland to the far, ice-crusted islets across the sea, much further than they were now, had heard of Night Fury's, but rarely any a man had ever actually _seen _one, and most of those that had only caught a glimpse of one jetting away after unleashing a devastating blast onto a village or ship of unprepared Vikings.

The unholy offspring of lightning and death itself. Your only chance is to hide and pray it does not find you.

He had heard that more times than he could count in his lifetime, but

he had no plans of hiding. A Night Fury was still a dragon, and dragons could be caught, and injured, and slain. Inside the cave with only limited room for such a beast to fly, and having surprise on their side, _they _had the advantage. Such a mysterious, fast, powerful beast was too valuable to simply let walk in and out without even attempting to capture it.

His crow companion gave a low, barely heard croak of alarm, but he uttered a quick, near-silent "_Hush_" before it could carry on into a raucous of cawing and scaring it into either fleeing or fighting.

The beast paused, what looked to be ears or horns of some kind perking and rotating slightly, as if listening, but it didn't turn to flee or look as though it was about to attack. It slunk forward again carefully and came to stop in front of one of the caves where it wasn't covered by cloth.

He thought he heard soft, dragonic vocalizations, but he couldn't be entirely sure. He paused as he saw something else move. At first he mistook it for the creature's wings, but realized it wasn't the Night Fury at all, but something else. Something smaller, on its back.

Was thatâ€¦| another dragon?

It was difficult to tell. The creature blended almost perfectly with the black scales of the Night Fury. Maybe it was a baby dragon? Did Night Fury's carry their babies with them? Maybe they only had one chick, as opposed to most other species that had at least three or four babies per nestâ€¦| maybe that was part of why they were so rare.

The more he looked, though, the less it looked like a Night Fury. True, it had black scales and claws, but its build was entirely different. It almost looked like the form of a human.

He watched it climb down and noticed that it _was _human. It was a human, _riding _a dragon. Wearing its scales. Touching it and he thought maybe even talking to it like it was a common pet, holding no fear or hostility of it.

But they didn't move right, walking in an awkward, almost animal way. They seemed to know what they were dealing with though, with the cage, and were already working to unlock it and steal away the captured dragons.

By the Godsâ€¦| he'd never have believed this had he not seen it himself.

The Night Fury sat back and watched the person in dragon armor work, neither seeming terribly concerned about being caught. To be honest, had he not been so perceptive to the sudden nervousness of the horses, and really had gone to sleep unaware of the presence of the lurking Night Fury and rider, they likely would have succeeded in their mission to get the captured dragons out with no one the wiser until morning was in full swing many hours later.

Whoever they were, they knew what they were doing, and they were probably ready to easily flee at the first sign of danger too. He was going to have to ground them before they made any bold moves.

It was with that in mind that he moved very slowly and carefully, positioning and aiming his crossbow at the very base of the wings at the shoulder, and fired.

A second before the bolt landed, the dragon perked its ears alertly, but not fast enough to see or stop him from hitting the mark.

The Fury yowled profusely and jumped, flaring its wings. Twisting. Turning. Trying to attack whatever _thing _had attacked its wing and stayed there. He heard a similar sound from the dragon boy, a sound that wasn't even remotely human, but filled with a sense of alarm and perhaps worry rather than physical pain, running a circle to see the creature's side as it spun in place trying to reach the bolt with its teeth furiously.

Alekt flung the blanket off, rolling to his feet. The other men who had been simply waiting for their cue took the moment to leap up as well.

"Do not let them escape! I want them alive!"

The cave filled with a mix of battle-cries and vicious dragon roars as the men charged and both the Fury and dragon-armored man whirled on them with snarled fangs.

One of the men immediately went skidding somewhere off to the side as the dragon whipped its tail into him. Another was sent sprawling as he was head-butted, charging too close, and the dragon pounced at him with a roar. Seemingly losing his nerve, the man scrambled back on all fours like a crab and ducked behind one of the tables.

Three men at once were ready to attack, but hesitated as the dragon whirled on them, shuffling a few steps in any direction as though debating whether to attack or turn and flee. When they settled for attacking, it was with notable fear and half-assed assurance, getting easily knocked away by the monster's tail or bulky legs.

Those that attacked the smaller man weren't having much better luck. Alekt watched one man dive straight on top of him, only for the dragon-armored man to roll onto his back right as he would have been pinned, all four limbs flipping the man through the air as though he weighed nothing, and then rolling back to his feet, ready for his next assailant.

He didn't have a weapon such as an ax or sword, but Alekt now noticed the clawed gloves on his hand that easily managed to slash at the second Viking stupid enough to attack him head on, quickly gaining the upper hand and advancing while Alekt's own subordinate retreated with shaken resolve.

The third to attack wasn't _quite _as stupid as to charge in from the front, instead coming behind and grabbing him in a bear-hug, but that proved about as effective as most everything else when the rider bit his arm and drew blood. The man howled and foolishly released, screaming in a voice reaching a higher pitch with shock, "He _bit _me!"

He didn't recover from his surprise fast enough to avoid the dragon-man whirling on him and launching another attack with his

claws, leaving slashes not only on flesh but leather hide as well as the teeth marks on his arm.

Alekt had had enough of watching his men flounder about so uselessly, whistling shrilly from where he stood.

Sangrida nickered in response and trotted to his side where he mounted bare-back in one fluid motion, kicking her side. She bolted forward obediently, galloping around the tables and towards the fight, already trembling with excitement.

Both intruders heard and saw the pale Norwegian Fjord's charge and snarled, the dragon-man leaping onto the Fury's back and roaring a challenge in unison, both sounding equally dragon and not at all human.

Sangrida faltered a few steps in preparation and reared, kicking outward with both front legs, the war-horse lunging teeth and both hard hooves forward like a big cat attacking smaller prey. Both dragon and rider were seemingly caught off guard and retreated just out of range of its kick, looking uncertain, as though the attacking mare was something completely alien and unnatural and wrong.

Alekt took full advantage of their surprised confusion, signaling for Sangrida to keep up her advance and drove them back towards the wall, chattering and growling to each other as if trying to make sense of what in Helheim was even happening.

For a moment they turned to dart one way and bolt away, but Alekt steered Sangrida into cutting them off. Then they tried to slip past the other way, and the horse and rider blocked their escape again.

Having been cornered to the wall and tiring of being attacked and chased, the dragon snarled angrily and reared itself up now, splaying its wings and turning the tables to lunge, a blue fire alighting its throat with a keening screech that warned of it about to unleash the deadly lightning firebomb it was known for.

Sangrida whinnied in alarm as Alekt sharply tugged a fistful of mane and spun around, kicking back as the dragon leapt forward and making its jaw snap back on impact. Alekt and his faithful steed danced several yards away as the dragon fell forward and shook its head dizzily, groaning in disorientation and blinking rapidly.

The dragon-man roared in warning at Alekt as he rode closer, arching his back like an angry cat and curling his lips back to show all of his teeth, though they were woefully much less sharp and intimidating than those of his dragon.

He made an odd series of noises that Alekt couldn't quite make sense of, but he could tell the dragon did as it got a knowing look in its eyes and spread its wings, launching into the air. Whatever plans it had fell short as the black creature shrieked in pain and wobbled in the air, one wing twitching more than flapping and the whole dragon came careening back down onto the top of one of the cages, shaking itself off.

It still had yet to remove the bolt in its wing and, while it may not have been enough to do lasting damage, it was certainly causing

enough pain to make flying difficult, if not outright impossible.

The dragon-rider keened a noise of alarm and question, suddenly searching over his mount's form for the source of the hindrance.

Alekt's men had recovered by now, ready to take another jab at taking down the dragon, and ran towards the cage swinging bolas' and chain lassos overhead.

The dragon and rider were distracted by their hunt for the crossbow bolt as one of the men lassoed the dragons neck with a chain, both screeching their hatred and pulling away, trying to get free. Another looped around its swinging tail.

Trying to plant its claws into the top of the cage proved fruitless when the men heaved, trying to bring it back to ground level, since it was covered by a large cloth, instead only further helping the men as the dragon slid without purchase and toppled to the ground.

The dragon-man screamed an animal sound of horror as both dragon and human became tangled in chains and the folds of cloth, fighting vigorously to get free. Several men jumped onto both, not sure what they were grabbing or pinning down but intent on restraining the thrashing beast.

Even as they were, the smaller form of the dragon's rider crawled out from the cloth and snarled rage at them, going to attack the nearest man that had his dragon pinned. He didn't get that far as Alekt lassoed him with a chain around his chest and kicked Sangrida into a slow gallop, pulling the feral off his feet and dragging him several yards.

The young dragon-man only screamed and fought harder for his freedom, struggling with frustrated, scared frenzy. Alekt pulled the chain in and leapt down off his horse, tackling the intruder just as he started to stand.

He heard teeth snap, limbs both free and pinned kicking and struggling to hurt him. Even partially bound, his opponent was strong and fought well, using his own strength and momentum to try and flip Alekt onto his back and bite his neck like a wild predator, as if he didn't even fathom the very _idea _that he was human.

He heard a loud medley of screeches, howls, and roars, but he couldn't be sure if it was the dragon or man, or possible both, as he and the dragon-rider tumbled across the stone floor, both trying to pin the other. He thought he felt a pair of teeth grab his shoulder, but it only managed to bite into leather armor, too dull to pierce through to flesh.

Alekt kicked the feral man off of him and both managed to stagger to their feet, with Alekt recovering only a moment faster to charge in and pin the other man to the wall, just long enough to knee him hard in the gut.

He heard another screech but knew for a fact this time that it was the dragon, its rider gasping breathlessly and crumpling to the ground.

Alekt drew in several ragged breaths and sat over him, pinning the winded stranger with his full weight as he pulled the chains loose, only so he could remove the dragon-claw gloves and twist his arms behind his back, tying them together tight. He didn't want to take any chances and made sure his legs were tied as well. Somehow he didn't doubt, tied limbs or no, that the man would still prove a bothersome captive.

He was still trying to regain his breath by the time he had finished securing the human intruder, sitting up and brushing newly messed hair out of his eyes. His eyes wandered to the dragon which his men had, for the most part, managed to restrain as well, though with continued difficulty as it continued to writhe and growl.

"Get that dragon into one of the cages, and I want it heavily secured to one side of the bars," he ordered crisply. "And you there-" he motioned, to one of the others closest to his age that stood more toward the sidelines. "Embrik, correct? Help me with him."

Embrik eyed the man whom he had seen fight as if he were dragon in all but shape himself, wary to step close.

"_Now_," Alekt commanded impatiently as the dragon-man began to stir, recovering. Embrik huffed reluctantly and jogged closer, helping drag their captive partially upward and towards the cage where the other Norsemen were securing the dragon, tying it snugly against the bars on one side of the cage and muzzling it as Alekt had instructed.

Alekt set the dragon-man down and ordered them to keep him pinned there as he approached the Night Fury. The other men scattered as soon as it was fully secured and watched in awe as Alekt approached it without any fear.

Even tied down, the other men were terrified of the beast named to be the child of death and lightning, and for good reason.

He eyed the dragon with care, and it eyed him back, curling scaled lips away from fangs in an uncomfortable growl of warning.

"Very few have ever seen a dragon quite like you before," Alekt mused. "Much less so close."

The men held their breath, the beast snarled contempt and twitched away, and the dragon man howled his own hatred and disapproval, as Alekt reached a hand out to touch its side. It shuddered a breath under him as if utterly revolted at the contact, what part of its tail it could move smacking the bars of the cage like an angry feline, narrowing faintly glowing eyes on him in pure loathing of his very existence. It clearly wanted nothing more than to snap his hand clear off his wrist if only it could move to do so.

As his fingers traced to the bolt still lodged in the shoulder of its wing, he heard a worried moan from the beast and spiteful hiss from its rider, who thrashed against the other men keeping him pinned.

He grasped the metal bolt where it disappeared into scales and dragon flesh, bracing his other hand around it, and oh so careful, pulled it free. The dragon whined deeply and squirmed like a child trying to

stay tough and restrain themselves from crying, but soon enough, the projectile was free and he tossed it aside.

"Bring me a bucket of water and a cloth," he ordered as blood dribbled from the puncture. Several men looked about uncertainly, as though waiting for someone else to do so.

Hartvig, the grizzled man with the claw-scared face, rolled his eyes and went to fetch the things Alekt had asked for, since no one seemed ready to get anywhere near the dragon again.

When he received them, Alekt wet the cloth and dabbed away the blood, checking the wound. It wasn't bad. Likely it would close within days, and be fully healed within a week. Either way, it wasn't bad enough to completely prevent flight even now, once the bolt had been removed, though the muscles would be inflamed for likely another two days and cause it discomfort.

He was satisfied that that was all it had taken to capture the beast though, not wanting to cripple or kill it, despite that he could tell such a sentiment wasn't shared by his men, judging by the looks alone that they were giving it.

He gave the dragon a last reassuring pat, which was met with a snarl, and stepped back out.

"Close the cage, and put him in another," Alekt ordered with a motion of his head to the dragon's human companion. "I don't want them together in the same cage. I'll figure out what to do with them in the morning. I want them given just enough water to survive on, but nobody feeds or touches them for _any _reason until I order it."

4. Chapter 4

****A/N: ****I'm actually really glad I started writing this because, for whatever reason, it's helped me find my muse to work on one of my own original stories(that I hope to one day publish) again. Motivation seems so hard to come by these days, ya?

And I've definitely been reading and smiling at all of your guy's reviews, I promise! I'm just not always good at knowing how to respond ^_^; But I appreciate each and every one of you!

Also, I've been pondering whether or not to have this be before or after Nightfall and finally settled on "after".

* * *

><p>Learning from the Masters
****A How To Train Your Dragon Fanfiction
>**Based of Le'Letha's "Nightfall"**

* * *

><p>There was only one thing that weighed on his mind right now and that was that this was indescribably the very epitome of
wrong.

Halves were not meant to be separate, they were meant to be _whole _and yes he and his Toothless-_love _sometimes were apart but not like this and not so far and not where they couldn't even _see _each other if they wanted and it was all so _wrong bad wrong separate love gone where love where gone bad wrong where Toothless love go?_

He heard an answer and he knew immediately who it was and that his _beloved _was still alive and trying to talk but didn't sound right and he couldn't see where or if he was _safe _or what the _bad vile hurting pfikingr _had done to his Toothless-half and he couldn't _quite _reach the side of the cage where he could see outside. All but the side with the door was covered by a large cloth that reached all sides, so he only had a narrow window of sight to the outside of it, and to the rest of the cave.

He gave another frustrated tug of the shackles just above his human paws, but all it managed to do was rattle the chain holding them, and he growled lowly in anger. The _pfikingr _had taken his dragon claws and knife and anything else he might have used to break free or unlock the key hole on one of the shackles. The chain was long enough to roam about his cage somewhat, but not reach the far end with the door where two of the humans stood watch, and he had already tested the parts of the cage walls he could reach for a way out, but there was none.

He snarled _bad trapped where love Toothless love where bad angry scared bad restless trapped Toothless where angry restless separate gone wrong wrong wrong wrongwrong you me we us need bad separate bad wrong crazy crazy wrong!_

The closest they had come to being separated like this had been on their attack of the dragon-eater's nest, but that had only been minutes. This time was _hours _and he _couldn't stand it anymore!_

He howled a distressed, mourning wail for his other half's company like he was dying, yanking on the chains that kept him away from his Toothless-half, and the dragon reciprocated his cry with one of his own, the two keening at each other _you me we us need love love separate lonely need scared angry need love love love you me we us love separate wrong scared need together together yes love love love._

One of the _pfikingr _snarled something at him he could only partially make sense of, recognizing "_stop_"but very little else, the man banging on the cage with the gleaming edge of an ax loudly in warning.

The man had still-healing gashes that Hiccup himself had left on his flesh, but he was too agitated to feel smug, baring his teeth in rebellion, snarling back _no free you free us we free bad pfikingr go out free we us free go bad pfikingr!_

The He _pfikingr _growled something but it was lost to him amongst the gibberish of human tongue.

How could he make these stupid _pfikingr _understand when they couldn't speak right? How could he tell them that he _needed _to be with Toothless-_mine _more than anything and how badly being apart was _eating him alive _like a hoard of squirmy white dead-thing bugs

that chewed out insides until the dead-things were hollow?

Cold was already creeping in on him like a dead-thing being away from Toothless' heart-fire so long but it wasn't the kind of cold that the wind or the snow brought. It was something worse that made him tremble like it was cold when it was not, but why else did anything shake like this? He knew that dragons shook with fear and sometimes anger when they were _really, really _mad but this wasn't either of those feelings. It wasn't a feeling of building power like anger but it was deeper and more cutting than the greatest fear, and not quite like the horrified heart-pain that had come with _Uh strrrrTT _showing him his body was human and his conflicted thoughts of leaving his Toothless-self, but it was just as bad, if not worse in its own way.

It was a bad, hollow, emptying feeling that had him leaning on the side of the cage and sliding down to draw his body close to itself, softly banging the back of his head against one of the thick, flat, metal bars with a low, short _clo-ng_, whimpering his pain quietly _lonely love Toothless love need lonely pain alone cold scared lonely we us need love love hurts lonely where lonely Toothless love need we us Toothless we together always lonely apart._

Eventually he dropped everything else, only repeating _Toothless love love love Toothless love Toothless Toothless_, the dragon uttering back a wrong-sounding _love yes love Hiccup love here love Hiccup here love love yes love yes_.

One of the _pfikingr _yelled something at him again and banged the cage with his weapon for silence, but Hiccup only snarled his dragon mantra louder in defiance, refusing to quiet himself for the _bad hurting pfikingr _that kept him and his _Toothless-heart love us we yes you me we us _apart. They couldn't physically be together but they still had their voices and they would sing their affections for their other half back and forth to each other no matter how angry it made the _pfikingr_ and not lose each other even if they were apart.

The _pfikingr _growled more things he couldn't understand but he didn't care at all, only wanting to hear Toothless' voice answer his and assure each other that even now they were still _together _and still two halves of a whole and not even cages and sharp _pfikingr _weapons could fully stop them from being one-who-is-two.

The two cage-guards gave up their angry noises soon enough and instead ignored the dragon and dragon-man as they chattered and crooned to each other to ease just a sliver of the loneliness of apartness in the dark belly of different human trappings but the _bad cold lonely bad-shaking alone _feelingwouldn't leave.

He faltered slightly as one of the _pfikingr _figures approached whose likeness was burned into his mind like a hot coal on the flesh, the one that had chased and fought he and his Toothless-self on the _preynoprey _and even touched his Toothless-_mine mine! _with its filthy _pfikingr _paws and made Toothless _hurt wing hurt no fly hurt where hurt?!_

Hiccup heard Toothless squawk questioningly at his sudden silence _love quiet why quiet love hurt?_

Hiccup warbled reassurance, but his green eyes and attention were still heavily fixed on the _preynoprey pfikingr_.

He was a smaller _pfikingr_ than the rest, much closer to Hiccup's own size, with brown fur on his head and black fur and feathers as dark as Toothless' own scales. The _pfikingr_ rolled his head around one lifted paw with a soft _pop_ and yawned dull teeth, regarding the other two with eyes that looked half open, a pale blue like the sky on a cloudless day when the sun shone brightest.

The three _pfikingr_ spoke their garbled language to each other and, with a wave of his paw, the smaller _pfikingr_ sent the bigger ones away before coming to stand just in front of the cage door.

He spoke but Hiccup could make no sense of his words, though the tone of the voice was enough to make his neck tingle like when a breeze of frost ghosted his skin where his fur did not cover. It was not unnerving in that it was angry or snarly or loud or threatening like most _pfikingr_ or even a _scary mad_ dragon, or even like that of the dragon-eater Queen that rattled both him and his other half to the core.

This sound was soft. Quiet. Like the murmur of a small stream that barely trickled by. It was not intensity of feeling that rattled him, it was the lack of it. Dragons and even most _pfikingr_ were creatures of bold expression that talked with their sounds and their bodies and eyes and most did so quite loudly and sometimes outright flamboyantly that Hiccup could read fairly accurately within seconds.

This one _pfikingr_ wasn't like that though. It was like trying to figure out what a rock was thinking or feeling, which was silly even to the dumbest dragon because what could something that cold and hard and unmoving and completely indifferent to everything be thinking or feeling? But that was exactly what came to mind as he tried to figure the younger _pfikingr_ out in reading his face or tone or his body language that seemed non-existent.

When he did not respond at all, still stuck on what he should think of the _not moving stone cold no feeling pfikingr no warmth cold stone wrong stone not moving wrong no feel stone pfikingr_, they spoke again, in that same chillingly frigid voice that seemed hollow of everything living and warm and _feeling_.

The man continued to speak, but he could understand none of it, since _pfikingr_ could not speak right, but it sounded even more _wrong_ coming from this one in that cold, dead tone that made him question if he was even _alive_. Could dead _pfikingr_ still move and talk? He did not think so, otherwise _Uh strrrrTT_ would not have been so upset that dragons had been fighting and killing _pfikingr_ and asked for his help. And besides, the man didn't _look_ or _smell_ of a dead thing.

But there was still something about his stillness that Hiccup could not read that was _wrong_, like stagnant water that did not move and became murky and filled with bad smells and bad things that would make dragons sick to drink and bad to swim in because of nasty bugs that bit and stunk and burrowed under the flesh.

Hiccup snarled teeth at the cold-speaking Viking if only to garner a

reaction, something _natural _and _feeling _that he could actually understand and didn't make him want to retreat from the _bad wrong cold stone no feel no warmth pfikingr_.

They still did not even flinch at his threat display and Hiccup quickly dissolved into chattering nervously _cold no feel no move no warm bad wrong why pfikingr sick wrong sick bad why no warm cold no feel sick?_

He couldn't think of anything else to the _wrongness _that he felt about the _pfikingr _that didn't move and didn't feel and didn't talk like a not-dead thing. He had to be sick. There was something _sick wrong _about him like worse than a dragon that lost its heart-fire and what if that _sick wrong cold sick no feel no warm _thing spread to him?What if he'd spread the _sick wrong cold _to his Toothless-_heart love beloved _and took his heart-fire?!

That must have been why he was feeling _strange bad awful shaking cold bad-shaking cold _and like his heart-fire was going out because that _sick cold wrong bad pfikingr _had _touched _him with the _sick wrong _when they fought and then touched his Toothless-half and now they were both probably going to become _sick wrong _too and were apart and suddenly he _couldn't breathe _and he was pacing _restless sick wrong no sick wrong love Tt-(click)-th-uhp-ss sick wrong bad pfikingr sick wrong scared why sick no no no no Toothless! _and he could hear Toothless shrieking distress back at him _hurt Hiccup hurt confused sick wrong where love love confused safe yes where here love here!_

The _bad sick wrong pfikingr _was watching him as he tried frantically to pull free and run to his dragon-half and out of the trap and fly far and fast and _away _from the _bad sick wrong sick bad wrong wrong _thing and keep flying until it stopped holding onto him and his _Toothless-beloved _and they just had to fly fast and hard and _away_ from those _sick wrong pfikingr _eyes that stared and hunted him even when his body and the rest of his face did not and Hiccup frothed _stay away bad pfikingr sick wrong bad away Toothless we us fly fast far away sick wrong away pfikingr hurt sick wrong Toothless we us Toothless safe love love Toothless love_.

The _pfikingr_ stood still and merely continued to watch, showing nothing, not even a twitch of _feeling warmth heart-fire _only _cold unmoving no feel cold stone wrong sick bad wrong_, and then his lips twitched slightly, moving without sound at first, and then the noise that escaped them made the dragon-man freeze because he _knew _that sound and that sound was a name and it wasn't _his _name but it was a name that was that of his other half.

It did not sound right like how a dragon would speak but it did not sound wrong in the _pfikingr _way either, rolling the sound over and over, sounding faintly more right each time that he did.

"_Kthssâ€| Cthh-ssss. Thhh-sss."_

Hiccup listened, hardly believing it for a moment, before he hissed it back more clearly, wanting to see if the _sick wrong pfikingr _would parrot him.

"Tt-th-ss."

"_Tthhh-ss?_" It still wasn't quite right but it was something close, or at least closer than the wrong _pfikingr _way that _Uh strrrrTT _or _St-t-t-t-t-kk _say it when he sometimes sees them. He had almost forgotten the chill he felt hearing that voice in lieu of his surprise that not only was the _sick wrong cold no warm pfikingr _picking out what he was saying but that he was saying it in an _almost_ dragon way.

He spoke again in the _pfikingr _way that he could hardly understand but he could pick out _Toothless _and _drakkn _in what he could only guess was a questioning sound, though it was hard to know because his tone was so hollow and soft.

The _sick wrong pfikingr _looked at him for a long moment that he soon figured was expectation, waiting for an answer, asking what he thought was the same thing again with something about Toothless and drakkn.

"Yssssh! Tt-th-ss, drakkn!" He struggled to continue, not knowing how to properly communicate the rest, but maybe this _pfikingr _could speak or understand proper dragon if he tried hard enough to get his message across?! Were there _pfikingr _that could speak proper dragon? He did not consider himself one but he was like _pfikingr _in body but dragon in soul so maybe there were others that were like him and could speak properly? _Toothless safe together we us see together we us free go yes _please _maybe us together free?_

Hiccup could not tell if he understood, concentrating hard to read his face and his eyes and _anything _that would tell him the _pfikingr _understood and would let them go and let him be back with his Toothless_-love _because they were two halves that were only one together and they _couldn't _be apart and he just needed the _pfikingr _to _understand_.

The human spoke to him again but other than hearing something of Toothless he could not figure out what the man had said, nor figure out from that tone that was still cold and detached as rock. His hopes dropped as the man turned away now, moving away, and Hiccup cried out a plaintive wail of protest like a wailing hatchling and yanked at the chains on his paws.

He was sure that the _cold wrong pfikingr _heard him, but did not respond, interacting again with his own kind briefly, probably talking in that wrong-speaking human tongue again. Hiccup huffed in irate frustration and paced for a while, watching the _pfikingr _go about doing their strange _pfikingr _things and forgetting his and his other half's presence, then settled for sitting on the ground and mulling over how he was going to make these stupid _pfikingr _understand.

Unlike before though, he held a small prick of hope that maybe things would not turn out too bad. So far the _pfikingr _had kept him and Toothless and other dragons he heard occasionally shifting or chattering to themselves alive and one of them could speak something that was _almost _like proper dragon speech, even if it was only Toothless' name. Maybe they didn't want to hurt or kill him. Maybe they expected him to do something for them, like _Uh strrrrTT_, and he could bide his time for now until he could get his Toothless-half out.

He did not trust that the _pfikingr _wouldn't hurt them eventually, but he at least had a starting point to work with, with the strange _cold wrong pfikingr _that could talk kind-of like a dragon. Just maybe, he could teach him to talk the right way, and then Hiccup could outwit and convince him into letting them free.

5. Chapter 5

****Learning from the Masters**
>A How To Train Your Dragon Fanfiction**
>Based of Le'Letha's "Nightfall"****

* * *

><p>"So, Viktor, I believe it was, right?" Embrik glanced up as Alekt appeared at the long table to join the small breakfast group, taking a seat in front of a plate of food, already laid out. His pet crow perched on the edge of it and picked a crumb off the side of his plate, before hopping onto the young man's shoulder. "Tell me, how did you know it was a Night Fury we were dealing with? Supposedly no one knows what they look like."<p>

Alekt started to eat as he waited for the older man sitting beside Embrik to speak, closing his eyes as he chewed as if not quite awake.

"Aye, I've never quite seen one like that. Not so clearly anyway," the man stated, taking a bite of food himself, all the while continuing to speak. "They're a mighty rare species, but there were a few more when I was a lad, an' I've seen and heard them in raids back then. Believe me, I seen plenty o' dragons in my lifetime â€" blue dragons, red dragons, green dragons, brown dragons, grey dragons, heck, even rainbowy dragons â€" but the only species with black scales is the Night Fury."

Alekt nodded his head in understanding, satisfied with the answer he received.

"I see," the brunette hummed, munching slowly.

"I'll tell ya, though," the man continued when silence followed. "Of all the strange things I've seen in my lifetime, never have I witnessed a man that rides a dragon. _That _is the oddest thing in all of this."

"Neither have I," Alekt admitted softly. "But there's always a first for everything, isn't there?"

"Soâ€| have you managed to get a word out of him?" One of the other men asked curiously. "Other than those god awful animal noises he was making all night, like a damn beast 'imself?"

Alekt hummed idly, then made an odd noise that sounded somewhat like hissed words, but it was hard to be sure.

"Perhaps," he mused finally. "I picked one sound out of what he was saying. _Tthhhh-ss_."

There was a moment of baffled silence.

"And just what in the icy north is that supposed to mean? 'just sounds like an angry cat to me. Sure he wasn't just hissing and snarling at you?"

"I think it's what he calls the Night Fury," Alekt clarified. "He seemed to get excited more than angry when I repeated it back to him, although I'm not sure I'm saying it entirely right. And he also said _drakkn_, which I think is meant to be 'dragon'."

"Maybe you're just trying too hard to find some semblance of speech in that damn dribbling nonsense he snarls. My mongrel back home speaks better 'an he does. Who knows if a dragon says anything, anyway?" The man that spoke grumped and rolled his eyes, taking a swig of mead from his tankard.

"All creatures speak, in their own way," Alekt hummed in that same detached, apathetic tone, like ice itself, that always unnerved Embrik, even listening to it spoken to someone else. "You're simply choosing not to listen."

The man grumbled something incoherent but didn't otherwise argue, only shaking his head in disagreement and returning to eating. Embrik didn't speak, only sort of picking at his food as he watched Alekt out of the corner of his eye.

Alekt had seemingly lost interest in the men just as much as they had in him, instead turning his attention to the crow sitting on his shoulder, which had gone from scarfing down bits itself, either torn off the plate or handed to it, to attentively trying to shove a scrap into its master's mouth with its beak.

He couldn't help but wrinkle his nose slightly as Alekt actually parted his lips and accepted the offering, without seeming to think anything of it. He warbled something to it and it puffed up happily, picking up another scrap and nudging it up to his lips, uttering a wide array of soft noises Embrik hadn't the slightest idea crows could even _make_ before seeing Alekt and his bird interact. All he'd ever thought crows could do was make the same _caw caw caw_ sound.

Just like dragons. Were they like this sometimes too? All he'd ever heard from them were roars and snarls and the hiss of fire escaping their jaws. Maybe Alekt was actually onto somethingâ€|?

Embrik halted those thoughts with a shake of his head. He wasn't _onto_ something, the guy was just crazy, that's all! Everything he talked about was crazy. Flying Vikings. Dragons they could use to help Vikings fly, without worrying about all of them getting killed by said dragons. The guy talked to birds and now some deranged dragonic wild man for crying out loud who couldn't speak, only snarl and howl like he were a dragon himself! And now a Night Furyâ€| he'd seen how that monster had leered and snarled at Alekt when he'd gone up and touched it like it was just someâ€| someâ€| common _dog_.

There was something not right about a person who could waltz up and pet a _Night Fury_ of all things without being terrified silly, as if it wasn't the embodiment of death and destruction itself, and well known for it at that!

What was worse, he wasn't sure that even if the man's reckless lunacy got every one of them killed, the guy probably wouldn't even care. He wasn't sure anyone from Alekt's clan had even an ounce of emotion in them anywhere, from what he'd seen. How were they supposed to trust someone like that, who didn't even bat an eye at all the same things that other sane people did? How their two groups had become allied, even out of necessity, he'd never know. From every angle, it seemed like a bad investment to him.

"So Alekt," Hartvig's graveled voice rang, just before the scar-faced older man appeared, Embrik's eyes following him. He couldn't help but wonder if the old gashes were left from a bear or a dragon. Both seemed equally possible. "Have you decided on today's tasks?"

Embrik almost bristled at how casually and heartedly Hartvig spoke to him, as if he were speaking to an equal of his own tribe. So sure, Alekt outranked all of them while on this trip, but he didn't agree that he should, nor that someone of Hartvig's stature and prowess should be answering to him. Did the man have no pride at all?

"I have, actually," he hummed, picking the crow off his shoulder with a hand under its breast. The bird fluttered on his hand, then promptly shuffled back onto his shoulder, refusing to leave it despite Alekt's efforts. "I want a hunting party to take some of the horses and head northeast to the marshland. There was a pack of boars there digging for food in the mud about a week ago, and what meat we have left will turn to rancid carrion soon enough. Six men or so should do. You can lead them, if you wish."

The man nodded his head, patiently silent for the boy's remaining orders.

"Three horsemen will patrol the other areas of the island. Have them check the nets and water traps as they go, and bring back anything good that they might have caught. Between all of them, I want every man on the lookout for more dragons, or potentially, dragon riders. We don't know if he," he directed with his head towards the cage of their dragon-man captive. "-is alone. We need to be prepared if there are more."

Embrik couldn't help but glance around nervously. Could there be more like that first man and his Night Fury? What a ludicrous idea! But so was the idea of even one dragon rider. Who had ever heard of such a thing, anyway? And yet, they had one within their possession. How many more could there be? One more? A small band? An army? What could they possibly do against an army of dragon-riders though, much less if they also rode more Night Fury's? Huddle in a corner and beg not to be torched into cinders?

"I want four men scouring the side of the cliff and the inside of the cave. Find every entrance and exit out of here. Any path that leads outside, have it sealed. I want nothing able to enter or leave unless it goes through that front entrance, much less trying to surprise us again. The remaining six will stay here with me and hold down our camp."

Hartvig nodded his approval, offering up "I'll see to it that the men get the message," before he went to bark out orders.

"Embrik, you will help me tend the dragons this morning," Alekt told him before he had a chance to go busy himself elsewhere. Embrik couldn't help but give the other, who was only a year older than him, an incredulous look. He wanted to argue, but held his tongue, despite the burning desire to refute such an order. But it was an order and he was outranked here.

Instead he settled for passive silence, only nodding to show that he'd heard and returned to finishing his breakfast.

Once he was done, he stood to follow Alekt, who hadn't bothered waiting, already having unlocked the first cage, carrying a bucket of fish with him. Embrik immediately paused and second-guessed following with his own bucket of water as the beast inside, a Monstrous Nightmare, snarled at them.

He couldn't help but note that even the crow had favored perching on the top of the cage door, well away from the dragon, and Embrik's eyes nervously shifted to Alekt, who didn't even hesitate to approach, stopping just outside the range of how far it could travel on its chain.

The beast gave him a deadly glare and huffed smoke from its nostrils, but the teen merely crouched down, balancing on the balls of his feet casually, and held out a limp, dead fish.

The beast's focus instantly shifted to the food, nostrils flaring in interest, licking rows of sabre fangs hungrily. It momentarily looked back at Alekt with narrowed eyes, uttering a reverberating growl that rose the hairs on the back of Embrik's neck, expecting it to light Alekt up with flames.

Warily, it crept forward in a low prow, one clawed wing at a time, continuing to sniff audibly. It extended its neck for the fish, opening its jaws.

If it doesn't burn him to ash, it's definitely going to take off his entire arm, he couldn't help but think nervously. Maybe if the idiot got eaten they'd all get to call off this insane trip and go home though. He wasn't entirely sure he didn't want that at this point. What were they even going to gain out of this, anyway?

Ever so gingerly, the Nightmare grasped the head of the fish and yanked it away, leaving Alekt intact. Maybe that was just because it couldn't reach that far. It ravenously wolfed down the fish, and Embrik couldn't help but imagine that that might soon be one of them.

Alekt only held out another fish, the reptile giving him the wary eye, but gaining more confidence. Because that was just what they needed, a dragon confident that Vikings were more of a source of food than they already were for the beasts!

It took a second fish from Alekt, gulping it down. When it tried to snatch a third, he placed a hand on the horn of the dragon's nose, pushing its head down to the ground. The dragon screeched low in its throat and tried to pull its head away, snarling fangs at him. Embrik was sure he could see embers starting to ignite all down its body. Alekt didn't move. The dragon did, arching its body up with head still pressed to the ground.

The young man simply waved the fish past its nose, letting it smell the food. Its eyes were still trained on Alekt for a short time, but its hunger was too distracting, and its eyes started to follow the fish instead, a mournful sound, almost like a whine, rising from its chest. When the dragon deflated and lowered its body again, losing its aggressive threat display, he let its head go and let it take the fish eagerly, choking it down whole.

When all of the fish were gone, Alekt left the bucket of water for it and went to leave, locking the cage up again. The Nightmare eyed him with a mix of wariness and something else Embrik couldn't identify. He didn't try to for more than a few seconds anyway. What else was there to identify in a dragon other than hunger and death? It was probably just disappointed it didn't get the chance to eat either of them _as well _as the fish.

Alekt ordered him to get another bucket of water and fish and bring them to the next cage, where he did the same with a Raincutter. The Sailback and Hobblegrunt after that were only given water, with no attempt on Alekt's part to interact like the first two. The pet crow followed them the whole way, though it kept an even safer distance than Embrik did. He couldn't help but think that between master and bird, the bird was the smarter one for it.

Then they came to the Night Fury.

Embrik could feel its eyes on him before he could see them, piercing green with black slits, and a gleam that told him that this beast was _deadly _and it fully knew it. Even chained immobile and muzzled so it couldn't fire a devastating blast of lightning, it gave him a mighty glare as if staring straight into his soul and snapping its jaws around it.

He only now realized he'd paused in his steps from afar, and the dragon snorted out a loud, almost bellowing rush of air, almost like it was mocking his cowardice. He wasn't sure whether he should feel a rush of embarrassment or relief to have stopped some distance from it. He was glad to have its eyes off him when it shifted its attention to Alekt, those green eyes narrowing and the dragon snarling in a way that Embrik couldn't help but get the impression was something akin to a personal challenge.

Without a doubt, that thing hated Alekt _way _more than it hated him.

"I see you still remember me," Alekt mused in glacial monotone, coming to stand at the other side of the dragon, both eyeing each other down. The beast visibly snarled at him, and Embrik could almost _swear _he saw just a flicker of emotion cross Alekt's face. He wasn't sure what emotion, though if he had to guess, he'd have to say it was probably amusement. "I guess you're still mad about the bolt, aren't you?"

The man reached a hand out and touched its shoulder, delicately pulling back the wound and looking it over with keen eyes. The Fury uttered a noise that Embrik thought must be a roar, but it was muffled by its muzzle-closed jaw, jerking against the bars and making them rattle and clang. He heard another noise but he wasn't sure if it was the dragon or the dragon-man responding to it from one of the

other cages.

Alekt gave it a pat on the side like most men did for a common horse, only if that horse was big and had deadly fangs and claws and breathed _death _from its jaws and wanted to _kill _you for touching it.

"It will heal over time, though your memory of it might not fade so easily, I can only guess."

"I don't think you should be speaking to it so casually," Embrik hissed, unable to bring his voice to more than a whisper. "It's not like it understands you anyway. It's just a dumb beast."

He wasn't sure whether the Fury actually _did _understand him or it just didn't like that he was speaking period, pointedly shifting its glare to him now and snarling. He instinctively stepped back, going slightly paler, and the dragon snorted in a smug sort of way. Now he was almost _sure _it was laughing at his fear, however it was that dragons laughed.

"Not everything intelligent is the same or speaks the same as you do," Alekt reminded, in a way that Embrik couldn't help but think he was being scolded like an ignorant child.

Great, now the dragon _and _the loon were making fun of him!

He couldn't help but flush and want to clock both of them in the head, only the dragon would probably kill him if he did it to the Fury, and Alektâ€| he wasn't sure what Alekt would do, but tales of his clan's brutality before the alliance and the cold disregard for _everything _the other always displayed were enough to make him hesitate.

If Alekt noticed his anger at all, he didn't show it as he circled around to stand in front of the Fury, though the dragon certainly did as it bore into him with those gleaming eyes, as if reading his very mind. Up until its attention went back to Alekt anyway, with far more hateful intensity.

At least it doesn't look at me like THAT. He didn't know how Alekt could stand it. Not in the least. If looks alone could kill, Alekt would already be scorched into fragments of only bone left, muzzle or no.

And then he actually _crouched down _in front of its face, where they could both look each other squarely in the eye.

_He's suicidal. That must be eat. He WANTS to get killed by that dragon, _Embrik was starting to convince himself. That or he was having way too much fun staring into the eyes of lightning and death itself while the creature was bound and unable to live up to its namesake, silently taunting it. He could see Alekt secretly â€" Hel, not even secretly â€" being that arrogant.

He reached a hand out to touch the creature's nose like he had the Nightmare, and instantly it snarled pure loathing from every ounce of its form. Even heavily chained, its legs and wings bound, it was a breathtakingly, horrid, menacing creature. Embrik almost forgot that it was bound and was ready to turn and flee as it tried to jerk its

head away, looking for all the world like it was ready to eat Alekt whole, the end of its tail lashing wildly against the bars in the far back and once again uttering a muffled roar of utter disdain.

Alekt hissed something audibly and the dragon faltered, its eyes widening for a moment. Alekt repeated the sound that Embrik had heard him utter at the table, saying he'd thought it might be the creature's name.

"_Tthhhh-ss_?"

The snarls and roars died into a low, steady rumble, growling deep in its chest, but it looked more confused and taken by surprise than angry, tail still batting back and forth, but more slowly now, as if in contemplation and deep thought.

Its eyes were focused intently on Alekt as though it expected him to do or say something, what Embrik assumed to be ears twitching upward slightly, like a dog brought to attention. After a moment, it seemed to remember itself, what it was, and more importantly, what _Alekt_ was, and shook his hand off its nose, snarling. Alekt reached back out, but it jerked its head to the side, showing off its fangs as best it could, hissing in warning.

Alekt â€" the _idiot_ â€" finally seemed to catch the hint and let his hand rest across his lap instead, still staring at the dragon. It turned its head to stare straight at him again as well.

He uttered a sound like before, "_Tthhh-ssss_", and fell back into some of that bird-like, soft warbling, the only time that his voice actually changed octave or pitch from how he normally spoke. It seemed almost unnatural that his voice could go from such a dry, dead quality when he spoke to other people, yet he could exercise such a broad range of noises Embrik himself couldn't even _begin_ to make even if he tried when he fell into that bird chatter of his.

What's more, the dragon seemed as though it was actually _responding_, uttering its own series of snarls, hisses, growls, and low, long groans, likewise with much more range than he'd ever heard come out of a dragon. They sounded kind of like angry or irritated noises to him â€" then again, when did dragons _not_ sound angry and vicious? â€" but like they were more deliberate. Like maybe it was actually _saying_ something, and not simply growling dumbly.

Alekt reached a hand out again and he watched the dragon's wary passiveness turn angry again, trying to pull away and snarling. Alekt's hand traced to the leather strap that muzzled it, continuing to croon and clack at it. The Fury didn't relax, but it stopped trying to pull away, glaring distrust at him, and groaned back at him lowly.

"Embrik," Alekt spoke, actually startling the slightly younger male. In an instant, his voice had already become level and emotionless again, one blue eye peering back at him.

"Y-yes?" he stuttered, still struggling with his shock at the very _idea_ that Alekt might have just been having a conversation with a dragon. A _dragon_, of all things!

The odd male motioned for Embrik to step closer, and when he did, he

did so with great hesitance, eyeing both Alekt and the beast, which was now eyeing him back again. Gods, he _hated _those eyes.

And what did Alekt want with him all of a sudden anyway?

Maybe he's going to lure you in and let the dragon eat you. Maybe that's what they were talking about. He'd probably like that. He's probably sadistic enough under that indifferent demeanor to enjoy watching a dragon munch on your spine. Maybe he wants to see if it eats by ripping its prey apart or swallowing it whole. Maybe the dragon was just asking him how you taste.

"The bucket," Alekt directed, catching him off guard, though he wasn't sure why that came as such a surprise. He eyed Alekt's outstretched, free hand as though it was something alien, before finally handing it over.

He was quick to step back, watching as Alekt set the bucket in front of the Fury and moved slowly to loosen but not remove the leather strap keeping its deadly jaws shut. The creature eyed him every second that he did so, and Embrik almost wondered if the creature was going to try to kill them as soon as it could open its jaws even a little.

It didn't, instead continuing to stare at Alekt in the same alien way that Embrik had moments before, before tentatively turning its eyes to the partially overturned bucket, and started to lap at it, then eyed Alekt out of the corner of its eye again. Like a dog.

It justâ€|licked up all the water, and thenâ€| _didn't try to kill them_. He wouldn't exactly call it 'tame' but it was a lot more docile than he ever expected to see out of the beast. And then, though it did try to pull away and made a noise he was sure was protest, Alekt re-secured the leather strap so it couldn't open its jaw anymore, and then Alekt ran a hand over its head in a praising sort of way before he moved to close the cage and leave it alone again.

"This is a dream," Embrik muttered to himself, under his breath. "I'm just dreaming. None of this is real."

Alekt didn't show any signs that he'd heard Embrik's words, though he didn't expect the other to say anything about it even if he had. Instead, the blue-eyed brunette simply picked up the bucket, and casually started to walk away.

Embrik watched him go for a moment, then rushed to catch up. Okay, so Alekt still completely freaked him out and he definitely still thought there was something intimately _wrong _with him, but he'd just seen the guy do something _no one else _had ever done and he _had _to hear about it.

"How did you do that? You talked to it, right? I meanâ€| what did it say to you?" He flushed slightly as he realized he sounded like an overly enthusiastic child wanting to hear some incredible story he'd never heard before but had been hinted at, but it wasn't every day you saw someone have a conversation with a fire-breathing monster like that!

Alekt stopped and turned to face him. Embrik found himself trying to

read his face, but it was just as impassive and impossible to read as always, making him quickly grow frustrated.

"I haven't the faintest idea," Alekt shrugged after a moment of deliberation, non-challant. Embrik gaped.

"Youâ€|don't- butâ€|-" Embrik glanced over his shoulder at the dragon, then back at Alekt, motioning behind him at it helplessly. "That what was all _that_? I-I meanâ€| you made some sounds at it, and it made some back, andâ€|" he trailed off, feeling very lost.

Alekt shrugged again, the crow suddenly appearing and landing on his shoulder.

"Improvisation," he answered, idly reaching a hand up to scratch behind his pet bird's neck. The crow croaked a low sound and craned its head down as Alekt scratched it. "Dragons are still animals, like any other. They don't really use words with specific meanings like people, more justâ€| broad implications. Even so, they don't all think and communicate the same way, just similarly, the same as different lands have different languages. I know how to speak and understand crow, not dragon, but they're similar enough that I can basically fake my way through it until I get a better hang of it."

Alekt turned away dismissively, while Embrik couldn't help but stand rooted to the spot, too dumbfounded to move.

Soâ€| he'd basically pulled the wool over every one of their eyes. He'd made both Embrik _and _â€" from what he could tell â€"the dragon into thinking he could actually speak dragon. Just like that. He was never speaking it at all, and Embrik had never realized, and probably the dragon hadn't fully realized either.

With that revelation, he was also realizing something else.

"I really have to work harder on getting and staying on his good side," he deadpanned to himself, starting to understand why anyone would forge an alliance with such a clan once known and feared for its blatant callousness, hoping that there even _was _a good side to appeal to. He doubted as much. "I'm easily, unavoidably dead if a guy that fearlessly tricky ever decides we're no longer on the same side."

6. Chapter 6

****A/N: ****This took WAAAY too long to write cuz I had a bit of trouble figuring out how to do just this one chapter but I finally managed to pull it off!(Dragon perspectives are so _haaaard_)

I've also got a D Gray-Man/Assassin's Creed crossover(_"White Demon, Red Scribe") _going that I'm absolutely in-love with so far and a DGM/Last of Us crossover and Shadow of the Colossus fic on the way, if any of ya'll are interested in that! The Shadow of the Colossus one is gonna have a character that's sort of related to Alekt, in that they're basically from the same clan, though personality-wiseâ€| total opposites C:

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><p>Learning from the Masters
****A How To Train Your
Dragon Fanfiction
>**Based of Le'Letha's "Nightfall"**

* * *

><p>Two days was an absolutely insufferable amount of time to be separated. Toothless couldn't remember a single instance like this one where he and his other half had been apart like this, he and his dragon-boy having been together since either of them could first remember. They'd grown as hatchlings together and had always been one-who-is-two.

There was some measure of comfort, at least. They were still close enough to talk to and hear each other, though even that was lacking. Half of their communication came from body language, not words or sounds, and it was harder for Toothless to talk back to his other half because of the thing the _pfikingr _had put on his head.

He'd tried and tried and _tried _to get it off, but it held on with great stubbornness, and he knew this was one of those things only Hiccup's skilled paws, or that of the _pfikingr_, could get off, much to the Fury's dismay.

At the very least, the _pfikingr _had taken away some of the binding things that had made it impossible for the Fury to move, other than helplessly, futilely wriggling against them, though instead they'd replaced it with another on his neck so that he could only roam a short ways inside the cage itself.

He'd spent a good deal of time pacing about inside it, pressing his body up against the bars, or scratching at them, or simply looking at them, trying to find a way out of it. If his mouth was free, he could have easily broken out with a few charged blasts of fire, but the jaw-shut _pfikingr _thing prevented that.

When he'd finally grown tired of pacing, or just grown tired, he flopped down grumpily, though with no shortage of chattering to Hiccup. Neither of them were at all content, much less happy, with the situation, and neither did anything to hide it between crooning and warbling of _us yes love love yes here safe here love love love you me we us love here safe yes us yes_. The only time they stopped talking back and forth was when either one or both slept. Occasionally they would chatter with other caged dragons as well, confirming that none of them were hurt or being treated badly, which was a relief, but also confusing.

At the moment, Toothless was left in silence as Hiccup slept and the other dragons kept their voices to themselves, though what they were doing, the male dragon wasn't terribly sure.

He'd settled for splaying out along the floor of the cage, which had plenty enough room to do so, not counting his tail and wings if they were stretched to their full length, eyes closed but not really asleep, merely thinking.

What did _pfikingr _even want with live dragons, anyway? Perhaps they wanted them as companions, like the _Uh strrrrTT _did, but they had

only done that because the She had seen his Hiccup and him fly together first. Besides, these ones had the _preynoprey_ creatures that hunted and fought dragons that he had seen come and go with the _pfikingr_ many times since being caged, which still seemed _strange wrong crazy strange wrong_, so what did they need dragons for too?

The strange kind-of-dragon-talking _pfikingr_ came to see him twice per day, which Toothless could still track by the light or dark wafting in from the mouth of the cave, visible through the one open window of sight in the cage where the door was. Mostly the kind-of-dragon-talking _pfikingr_ just brought water when he grew thirsty, touched his head, and tried to talk dragon to him. Or at leastâ€¦what he thought was maybe dragon.

He'd chatter things that sounded somewhat like _safe friendly safe hello friendly peace friendly_, but it was hard to be sure. Even if that was right â€” and what was there to say it was since _pfikingr_ could hardly speak anyway? All except his Hiccup-self that he didn't consider a _pfikingr_ even if he looked kind of like one â€” Toothless was adamant not to trust it. Dragons could lie so it only stood to reason that _pfikingr_ would lie and trick too and Toothless had no reason to believe it wasn't a lie or a trick after they had hurt him with sharp shooting things and separated he and his Hiccup-self and tied them up in cages where they were trapped apart.

He's hissed back _bad distrust pfikingr hurt separate you me we us bad away stay away distrust no separate bad no back no trust enemy bad not safe_, but the _pfikingr_ didn't seem to understand very well, if at all, and Toothless had quickly found himself frustrated because the _pfikingr_ could kind-of _speak_ but he couldn't _listen_ and what was the use of one without the other?

At the very least, his wing was already fine after the _pfikingr_ had removed the sharp shooting thing and it had brought him water but he was _so hungry_. The _pfikingr_ did not bring him food, though Toothless could smell food-scent on him and sometimes somewhere else in the cave, and he had not eating since before they had first flown to this _pfikingr_ nest. It had been a long time since he had not eaten at all like this. He suspected that his Hiccup half probably didn't get food either, but his smaller half didn't need to eat like most dragons did. He could go longer with less or sometimes even none at all, even if the hunger-pains plagued him, but dragons needed lots of food to survive for long.

Toothless perked as he heard noises like one of the other cages being opened, on the far side of the row. Curious and wary, he stretched before getting up and moving as far as he could, craning his head forward to see. Several of the _pfikingr_ were milling about the entrance of one of the cages, which stood open, some of them holding more of the binding things.

The dragon tilted his head to listen, catching hints of them garbling to each other, but mostly it was the kind-of-dragon-speaking _pfikingr_, though his voice was odd and not at all like the dragon sounds from before. It was a strange sort of hollow murmur that lacked any sort of variation, so Toothless could not distinguish what kind of things he might be trying to communicate and whether what he was saying was good or bad or happy or angry or sad or anything at

all.

The kind-of-dragon-speaking _pfikingr_ made a few motions though and the others went to where he pointed, walking to the other cages, peeling back some of the soft coverings on the sides to about halfway, so that the dragons inside could see each other.

Toothless growled subtly at the _pfikingr_ as they came to his cage, who noticeably hesitated, but did the same. He snorted at them as they started to retreat, and one jumped into the air, before scuttling away faster, casting a scared look over its shoulder. Toothless narrowed his eyes and laughed a dragon laugh at the back of his throat at the scared creatures.

Toothless!

The dragon perked at the sound and looked for his smaller partner, spying his head of brown fur hopping up to see over the wings of other dragons in the two cages between them. Toothless almost squealed a not-so-dragon sound of delight and stood on his hind legs up against the bars, splaying his wings in elated greeting and pawing towards his other half through one of the gaps longingly.

Best yet was that he could see that _his_ Hiccup looked unhurt by the nasty trapping _pfikingr_ and energetic, jumping up and pacing to try and see him around bars and other dragons that were now shifting about curiously and interestedly checking out the odd little dragon, starting to block them from seeing each other with their bulk. Toothless hissed at them to move so he could get a better look at his other self and be sure he _really was_ completely okay, and Hiccup's eyes were scouring him as well.

Hurt wing hurt Toothless love okay love hurt wing? Hiccup chattered worriedly.

Fine fine not hurt no okay fine hungry fine not hurt wing good Toothless answered, batting his wings against the bars and showing off they were fine and still strong though the jaw-trap thing still made him somewhat off-sounding.

_Good yes relief good delighted worried scared Toothless-love relief happy good love worried miss you love love happy yes need you love relief, _Hiccup sang fondly and was soon joined in answer by Toothless crooning back _yes missed you worried scared relief happy good love need you affection love yes longing here here miss you love love you me we us you me we us!_

Their sort-of reunion was interrupted by a loud, quick banging that had both of them faltering, attention shifting to the kind-of-dragon-speaking _pfikingr_ as he bashed a metal thing on another, the sound echoing around the cave in a way that made Toothless' ears sting.

He seemed satisfied to have silenced them though and turned his attention back to the open cage, where Hiccup and Toothless followed his gaze to it.

Several of the _pfikingr_ held onto binding things as a fire-skin cousin slowly wandered forward, looking wary and chattering soft noises of nervousness and uncertainty as it stopped just within the

cage as though unsure then placed a clawed wing forward and slung out into the open. Several shiny binding things hung off places it wrapped around and _pfikingr_ held onto the far ends on all sides from a distance.

Toothless was watching them carefully, going as far as the chain would allow and sitting to observe. The fire-skin cousin stretched out its wings a bit further and tried to splay them, but the _pfikingr_ kept it from doing so with the metal binding things, so it crept forward along its belly instead, growling at them in distrust.

The kind-of-dragon-talking _pfikingr_ came to stand in front of it toting a _pfikingr_ thing with fish in it that immediately caught Toothless' hungry attention, the dragon stopping and shifting in an uneasy way, chattering _confliction danger human bad human fish smell fish hungry bad good food fish human fish good bad wary alert bad good distrust hungry fish bad good wary danger friend food danger human bad good?_

The fire-skin cousin turned his head to follow a fish the kind-of-dragon-speaking _pfikingr_ held up and waved around with a tongue swiping over sharp fangs and Toothless found himself licking the inside of his own teeth, shifting eagerly where he was sitting and belly pinching in want.

The human tossed it forward and the fire-skin cousin immediately snapped it up, scarfing it down whole. Already the _pfikingr_ had another fish in his paws, taking a few steps back. The fire-skin cousin eyed him warily, but followed at the same distance, following the fish.

He tossed another to the dragon and it snapped it up like before, continuing to follow, though not without glancing around at the other _pfikingr_ that kept taking a few steps around it in a circle, holding the binding things, chattering again nervously.

Toothless perked as he heard the sounds again that the kind-of-dragon-speaking _pfikingr_ had made at him, warbling a sound like _safe reassurance peace friendly reassurance safe friendly follow friendly safe peace_ which made the dragon noticeably confused, hesitating. The _pfikingr_ tossed another fish to it and continued to make those kind-of-dragon noises and led it forward, one fish at a time.

Immediately falling back into that equally odd, hollow _pfikingr_ garbling, he motioned something to the others of his kind and they pulled the binding things out, the fire-skin cousin screeching _alarm confused danger bad trick bad human no friend confused!_

Toothless snarl-growled distrust and hatred at the _pfikingr_ as the fire-skin cousin writhed and shrieked, spitting fire as its body lit up so that a few _pfikingr_ had to scatter back, though they didn't let the fire-skin cousin free.

He and his dragon-boy were waiting to see the tell-tale glint of a _pfikingr_ sharp thing coming to kill the cousin, but it never did, the smaller _pfikingr_ approaching carefully from the side and continuing to warble trick noises of peace and friendliness that Toothless hardly believed at all but after a time the cousin tired

and gave up struggling, making a mournful noise of _fear scared danger bad tricked me bad human!_

If the _pfikingr_ understood at all " and Toothless knew he _didn't_ " he only continued to make the same sounds back as if he didn't know how to speak anything else. He offered more fish, but the estranged dragon cousin didn't take it this time, instead snarling _no bad distrust danger bad human tricked me bad scared fear distrust bad!_

After a while, the _pfikingr_ gave up, tossing the last fish in front of the dragon, but the cousin still didn't go for it, watching the _pfikingr_ walk around and pick something up from the long wood _pfikingr_ thing where they often ate. Toothless was still expecting a sharp thing to kill it, but instead the _pfikingr_ picked up what he recognized as paper and a thing to draw with, casting a sidelong glance at his dragon-boy partner and watching him perk interestedly as he also saw it while other dragons also watched with curious uncertainty as to what was happening.

The kind-of-dragon-speaker glanced in his and his Hiccup-self's direction as though making sure they were seeing what was happening before he took a seat on the wood food-eating thing with the paper and said something to one of the other, bigger _pfikingr_ that nodded and took a loose rope with knots in it and started to walk around the beast with another smaller, more nervous _pfikingr_ that had reddish fur in-tow.

The held the rope out between them just above part of the dragon and spoke their gibberish to each other, then the kind-of-dragon-speaker started to do something with the paper which Toothless could only guess was to draw like Hiccup did whenever he could get his hands on paper.

The strange kind-of-dragon-speaker kept glancing at the fire-skin cousin that was stretched out by the binding things as the other two moved about it with the rope stretched between them and returned to drawing every time they said something in their strange tongue, looking like he was concentrating hard on what he was doing.

Toothless could make no sense of it as the _pfikingr_ continued to walk around and the kind-of-dragon-speaker continued to draw on the paper and eventually the rope was tossed aside as the two _pfikingr_ kept walking around, pointing with their paws and making noise and the dragon chattered its nervousness and confusion and confliction at them without answer and a black croaking bird of a kind that was annoying and tricky but not stupid and easy to eat like seagulls were landed on the kind-of-dragon-speakers shoulder peering curiously at what he was doing.

After some span of time had passed, the kind-of-dragon-speaker stopped and held up the piece of paper and stared at it and the fire-skin cousin for a long moment, glancing between them before setting it aside and standing. He made more hollow noises as the other _pfikingr_ who moved somewhat closer, no longer pulling it stretched out.

The kind-of-dragon-speaker moved around the dragon again, the black bird flying off to some far corner, and he moved close to the beast,

pulling off some of the binding things that made a weird rattling sound as they came off and then stepped back.

At first the fire-skin cousin didn't move, frozen and huddled in on itself looking more confused and at a loss of what to do than ever as the _pfikingr_ backed away to gain some distance. It blinked slowly and looked around at the _pfikingr_ and then the other dragons like it was asking what to do, then started to ease up a little and stand back to regular height, chattering _confused wary uncertain free? Free? No hurt tricked? Bad? Good? No hurt no bad good? Confused uncertain free?_

It momentarily tested what would happen by starting to crawl forward, watching the _pfikingr_ uneasily, then quickly snatched up the last fish that it hadn't touched and launched into the air, flying out of the cave unchallenged.

That was the point that Toothless was also completely at a loss.

Had the _pfikingr_ _justâ€¦ let the other dragon go free? He tilted his head toward Hiccup's cage and could sense similar confusion from his dragon-boy. Soon the other dragons were quietly murmuring similar things to each other in a hushed, interested, baffled sort of way.

If the _pfikingr_ were catching dragons and then just letting them go again unharmed, then just exactly what were they hoping to gainâ€¦?

7. Chapter 7

****Learning from the Masters**
>****A How To Train Your Dragon Fanfiction**
>****Based of Le'Letha's "Nightfall"****

* * *

><p>"Tchâ€¦ the nerve of that guyâ€¦" Embrik muttered unhappily, casting a glare over his shoulder at Alekt, who was still scouring over those damn doodles of his. " 'can't believe we're actually doing this. I think I'm lucky I didn't get toasted or have a limb eaten!"

Okay, so the Nightmare had had chains around its neck so it couldn't swivel its head to bite at him, but even so, that wasn't the least bit reassuring. The species of that beast had a reputation for a reason!

"Let it go, lad," Hartvig admonished patiently as he led the way, toting along fresh water for the horses.

" '_Let it go?' _Don't you even see what he's doing?" Embrik demanded hotly, glaring.

"Aye, I see what he's doing, and he's doing a damn fine job of it if you ask me," Hartvig nodded, a few of the horses perking and coming up for water. The lumbering man pushed away a few that were getting too pushy, laughing lowly as he patted them with a firm hand. "Now just hold on, you'll get your turn!"

Embrik blew a lock of red hair out of his face testily, holding up his own bucket for one of the mares.

"Well he's not doing so well from where I'm standing," Embrik argued, clenching his jaw. " 'making us do all his dirty work while he sits there and does pretty pictures, always looking like he doesn't care, not having the sense to be afraid of those monsters. It's not right."

"He knows what he's doing and he's lettin' us handle it because he trusts that we'll do the job properly."

"Yeah, the job of getting eaten," Embrik snapped. "He likes to act all tough and stone-faced around the creatures when they're all tied up and can't rip him apart, but it's the rest of us that have to deal with them in the mean-time! And have you seen the way he goes about his business with that Night Fury? Talkin' to it like he's all chummy with them the same way he's always chatting up that damn pet bird on his shoulder, but he won't even try to talk to his own kind like that, always just with that distant, apathetic voice like we're too beneath him to even spare the effort! The guy's got feathers between his ears and the dead weight of an iceberg in his chest, I tell ya, same as all the other icy freaks of his clan, and our lives are in his hands!" He scoffed openly. "I think I'd rather trust myself to the dragons than him. At least I know where they stand."

"A smart man is wary of dangerous things he doesn't understand," Hartvig nodded. "A wiser man though knows where the fear ends and a healthy respect and understanding for his enemies begins. Just because Alekt looks impassive doesn't mean he isn't without fear, lad, he just doesn't let it rule him."

Embrik gave the man a disbelieving look.

"How can you even say something like that about a guy content to sit on the sidelines watching us struggle to hold down a dragon by ourselves while he just watches us and draws like there's no danger to be had whatsoever? And then just lets the damn beast go without any precaution to any of our safety afterwards?"

"Because he ain't thinking with his feelings and his fear," Hartvig replied simply, giving Embrik a meaningful look. "He's thinking with his head, and that ain't something a lot of people know how to do, much less at his age. Maybe that's just the way his people do things, maybe that's just him, but whatever it is, I have faith in a man that's got a clear head on his shoulders even when he's dealing with what rightfully terrifies most into stupidly cowering like rabbits."

"So you're saying I should just do what I'm told and be like him?" Embrik demanded huffily.

"I'm saying you should give him more of a chance," Hartvig corrected. "So far no one's been mortally wounded or killed, have they?" When Embrik looked unconvinced, he continued. "What do you think that dragon wanted most of all out of that situation? To go on a rampage, killing us all, lighting us on fire and happily watching us burn?" Embrik opened his mouth to reply, but Hartvig interrupted him. "-or do you think it would rather skip all that and the possibility of

getting hurt or killed itself and run away to return to its regular life doing regular dragon things free of cages and chains and the fear of axes and swords bringing an end to its life?"

Embrik looked torn between the two answers, mulling over both of them.

"Toâ€¦ run away and live?" he guessed finally. Hartvig nodded his approval.

"Vikings, dragonsâ€¦ doesn't matter, everyone just wants to live. Now, dragons don't fear much, but everything fears death. Most of us live our whole lives fearing it. If I were a dragon, which-" he paused to laugh. "-obviously, despite my size, I'm not, I think I'd choose life if I had the option too."

Embrik frowned, the horses having finished the buckets of water by this point.

"That's not very Viking-like, to be talking like that." There was no glory in running away, despite how many times Embrik had felt like he wanted to recently, and no place in the halls of Valhalla for such cowards.

Hartvig only laughed again heartily.

"I am getting too old to care for what might be seen as making me more or less of a Viking. All I know is that I have seen many battles and many retreats, but in retreating, I lived and had to time to regroup and claim victory in the end. If I had not been meant to live, then the Gods would have taken me already, retreat or no. That's just how it works, lad. We don't choose when we die, only _how_ we do it when our time comes."

Embrik hummed thoughtfully as he followed to get more water, gnawing the inside of his cheek in contemplation.

"Soâ€¦ do you think dragons believe the same thing?" He thought aloud. "That if they run away, they can always just return to take victory later?" He saw the look that Hartvig gave him and flushed, only now realizing what he was saying. "I-I meanâ€¦ never mind, that's stupid, right? Since when do dumb beasts like dragons even think of stuff like that?"

Hartvig looked ahead and uncomfortable silence lapsed between them.

"I couldn't say for sure. Dragons are mysterious creatures. It could very well be that they're just waitin' for a chance to regroup and come after us." That thought made Embrik prickly nervously. "But only time will tell if that's the case. Anyway, I'm sure that Alekt has thought of the possibility already. I think he's already prepared for it."

Embrik nodded uncertainly, but he wasn't so much worried about Alekt being 'prepared' for it as he was everyone else.

"Anyway, after we get water for the horses," Hartvig began again. "Maybe a good hunt will help you clear your head for a bit. 'get some fresh air away from all these fire-breathing behemoths."

Embrik nodded his head, that sounding like a better idea than anything he'd heard all week.

* * *

><p>When Hartvig had suggested he go out riding on a hunt, this wasn't exactly what he had in mind.<p>

He couldn't help but scowl at Alekt's backside as the other young man rode in front of him on Sangrida, trotting through the ravine single-file. Of all the people to be stuck with right now, when he was already in a bad mood, why did it have to be him? Either the Gods themselves or Hartvig had a sick sense of humor.

He sighed to himself. It couldn't be helped. Come to think of it, Alekt had hardly left the cave at all since they arrived, other than to go out chasing down and trapping dragons. The guy had to be feeling pretty locked in by now too. Wellâ€¦ if he felt anything at all, which the redhead often doubted.

Embrik's eyes wandered upward as the man's pet crow cawed at them from a tree branch once they reached the forest, then took to the air, flying away somewhere. Alekt was watching it intently as well, following the general direction it had taken. The forest was mostly still, though some birds chattered and flitted about the trees, and a hare darted across their path, but it was thin and not worth the effort of catching, so they let it scamper away into the undergrowth unharmed.

Embrik was hardly worried about birds or rabbits though, warily watching the sky above, listening for tell-tale screeches and roars of dragons, or the wing-beats of looming death swooping down on them. However, the air was still. Unnervingly so.

A thick fog clung to the trees below, thoroughly shrouding them. He was used to cold fog, though, such a common thing back home in Norge, using his other senses and paying attention to the horses' behavior as he tried to ignore the awkwardness that accompanied their silence.

Just what the Hell was he supposed to say anyway, especially at a guy he was pissed at that he was supposed to be getting along with? He licked his lips self-consciously. Maybe he didn't need to say anything. Alekt was probably focused on the hunt anyway, and he doubted the man would even notice if Embrik stayed silent. Hell, he probably would hardly notice if Embrik just up and left entirely. He hardly even spent time with his own men when he wasn't going around dealing with the dragons, and only really because he was too small a guy to do it entirely on his own, the coward.

He heard a distant cawing, three of them, and then a pause. He was almost startled when Alekt made a similar noise back, sounding exactly like a crow himself, the same way that crazy dragon-man sounded more beast than human. He couldn't help but wonder what they might have been saying, if anything.

He remembered Alekt saying something about animals talking in broad implications, rather than specifics, like humans did. Maybe the idiot couldn't actually speak or understand crow or any animals though,

same way he'd faked his way through speaking dragon. Would he really be able to do that?

Then again, he'd fooled both the dragon and Embrik into thinking he could speak and understand it. What was to say that he couldn't trick a dumb bird into the same thing? Hell, maybe he was still tricking Embrik and the young man hadn't realized it.

Maybe he's tricking us ALL and we don't realize it, he thought bitterly as the crow cawed again, and Alekt cawed back. Between the dragon-man and Alekt, he wasn't sure which was more insane.

There was a more rapid series of caws this time, but Alekt didn't reply, instead pulling his horse to a halt.

"Something's ahead," he tossed back as he loaded his crossbow, startling Embrik with his words more than the crow calls had. The redhead quickly nodded and swung out of his saddle as he retrieved his own bow, following the other man through the brush, creeping quietly.

Before long, Alekt stopped and brushed aside a fir branch, peering over a small cleft. Embrik peered over his shoulder and spotted the same point of interest, a sizeable deer that picked its way through coarse grass, nibbling and angling its ears nervously, sensing it was being watched.

Alekt slowly positioned himself on the rock and aimed, while Embrik knocked an arrow.

"Hit the back thigh," Alekt whispered levelly, once against surprising Embrik, though he nodded and aimed. At about the same moment, they fired. Embrik's arrow found its right thigh, and Alekt's bolt found its right shoulder.

The deer gave a squeal and staggered, trying to sprint away, but instead it fell on its side as both legs on the right gave out under it, flailing. Embrik had never seen a deer go down like that so fast in his life, recounting endless chases of his prey through the woods, even ones that got away because they were too quick even despite being injured.

Alekt stood and leapt down out of the brush, quickly crossing the distance to the animal and ending it with a blade through its eye and into the skull. Embrik couldn't help but shudder at just how swift and merciless a kill it was, imagining that he could probably be just as efficient in a fight against an human if he wanted to with that kind of deadly, surgical precision. Maybe he wouldn't even need help against a dragon, if it came down to it, and that was a truly terrifying thought.

That guy's just as scary as any Night Fury, he couldn't help but think, not having even moved from his hiding spot yet. Heck, the guy even dressed in mostly black like the beast.

"Let's get a move on," Alekt barked in monotone as he slung the deer over either shoulder, holding it by the legs, and trudged back towards the horses. Embrik remained silent as he followed, still reeling. "We still have other prey to find."

Embrik mounted after they'd secured the deer onto Sangrida's back and they continued on, following crow sounds again.

"Soâ€¦ what does it mean?" he asked after a while of tense silenceâ€¦ or at least it was tense to him. He was still having flashes of seeing the other take down that deer the way he had, and his mind was dredging up other images of all the ways he could think Alekt could probably do the same to him, or anyone else, if he decided he wanted to. He'd be lying if he said that Alekt didn't scare him, but he also recalled what Hartvig had told him earlier and was trying to push those feelings aside. He was failing hard, but he was trying. "Those crow calls, I mean?"

Alekt glanced back at him with those emotionless eyes, and he shuddered, glad when they turned ahead and off of him again.

"Those sounds are companion calls," he said just after the bird croaked at them again, with those short, timed croaks, then paused. "If you put it to human words, it would be as if he were saying, 'This is where I am, I'm over here, but nothing worth attention is happening'. Nothing more than a greeting to other crows, really."

Embrik nodded in understanding, never having thought much of it.

"When the crows caw in faster, irregular beats, it means something interesting is happening. The more cawing you hear, the more interesting. Sometimes its danger, sometimes it's a source of food they've found. Anything worth giving attention, really. Finding out exactly what it is though requires going and finding out for oneself."

Embrik nodded at the same time that he heard more excited cawing like just before they'd found the deer, Alekt flicking the reigns of his horse into a trot.

"Umâ€¦ so how do you know that he's leading us to animals we can hunt?" he couldn't help but wonder aloud.

"Because we understand each other," Alekt replied simply. "Without being able to speak specifics, he already knows. It's a simple matter of mutual gain. He finds the animals I need to hunt, and he gets to eat what I kill. That's all either of us needs to know."

Those words gave Embrik the most amount of pause. How did one even accomplish that? It wasn't as though humans didn't have animals as companions, but mostly it was nothing like Alekt described.

How did the crow know what Alekt wanted without him telling it directly? Dogs and horses needed commands, and followed them unquestioningly most of the time. Even people needed to be told what to do, and they were the smartest creatures around, almost the top of the food chain! Even dragons had to fear humans killing and trapping them!

It made no sense, yet it seemed like it did to Alekt. Maybe it was something only those on a whole 'nother level of insane, like Alekt or that dragon-man, could ever hope to grasp, and he was just wasting his time in even trying.

* * *

><p>Another catch â€" a boar â€" and some fish gathered from nets later on, and Embrik couldn't be happier to be back. The young Viking had been impressed and a little scared by Alekt's efficiency in taking down the deer, and equally so when they'd hunted and killed a boar, though it had still been a lot more trouble than their first kill.<p>

Boar hunting was always such a pain, but at least they would eat well.

After they'd returned though, it was the same annoying thing all over again. Alekt went traipsing off to go coddle and talk to his damn dragons and wild dragon-man, then return to his drawings, while he left everyone else to take on the _real _work.

Absolutely everything about the guy was getting on his last nerve in one way or another.

He cast a glare toward the brunette even as he himself sat by the fire, waiting for the meat and fish to finish cooking on the spit. Even now, the other man was sitting somewhere off to the side, mulling over his papers, occasionally drawing, but mostly just staring over them like he was in deep thought.

He huffed and turned his glare to the fire, the smell of cooking meat making his stomach audibly rumble. At least it looked like some of the fish was finally done, taking one of them for himself.

"Maybe you should go and take Alekt some food, before he forgets to eat entirely," Hartvig told him from off to his side, earning a stricken look from Embrik.

"What? Why _me_?" he demanded.

"Because you've been glaring and huffing at him all day."

Embrik scowled petulantly, but he wasn't in a mood to argue, standing up testily and dishing up some of the fish and brewing potatoes for the object of his annoyance, before finally approaching, still wearing the same expression.

"Hey, the other guys wanted me to bring you your share," he said, barely resisting spitting the words. Alekt hummed, but barely acknowledged him, continuing to stare at his papers and make the occasional mark. That was serving to tick him off even more.

"Go ahead and set down next to me. I'll get to it in a minute."

Without a word, Embrik did, then stepped back, hovering for a moment. He was fully intent on turning back for the fire, maybe take his mind off with listening to some old war stories, but curiosity got the better of him, and he couldn't help but lean over to look at what Alekt was doing. He'd never really given the guy's drawings a good look before now. What kind of Viking just sat around drawing things, anyway? He should have been out there helping do the heavy lifting with the rest of them.

The scene of the deer kill flashed through his mind again, and he resisted shivering again. Maybe he wasn't doing it because he just didn't need the practice.

The sketches that he saw were somewhat confusing to him. He knew what Alekt was intending on crafting, but most of it still made little sense to him. Making wings for Vikings was such an asinine idea. If it would actually work, then wouldn't someone else have done it by now? Or, heck, if humans were meant to fly, wouldn't they have simply been born with wings? They were humans, not birds or dragons. They belonged on the ground!

Alekt glanced up at him for the first time, and Embrik couldn't help but hope with a certain smugness that he was making the man self-conscious all of a sudden. It would serve the guy right with everything he'd put them all through lately!

"Is there something you wanted?"

"Oh no, nothing really," Embrik shook his head, feeling more confident than he remembered ever being before. If he was making Alekt uncomfortable, then he was going to milk it for all its worth. "Just looking at what you're doing."

Alekt hummed and turned his eyes back to his work, and Embrik had to resist grinning. Maybe he was just imagining it, maybe it was the stress getting to him in a bad way, but he could almost swear that Alekt seemed almost squeamish under his watch. The longer he lingered though, the more silence dragged on, and the more indifferent Alekt seemed. Embrik quickly found it backfiring as he became self-conscious himself.

Seriously, did nothing get to this guy? Ever?

"Soâ€¦ uhâ€¦" he began, merely trying to distract himself from his own discomfort. The indifferent silence was starting to become stifling. "Isâ€¦ this-" he directed to the drawings with a flick of his wrist. "-something your clan normally does, too?"

Y'know, besides killingâ€¦ trapping dragons alive only to buddy up to themâ€¦ being colder than the most frigid mountain winds._

"Yes and no," Alekt answered both simply and cryptically. Embrik bit his lip in frustration, but tried to shove his temper back into hiding, recalling Hartvig's earlier words. Alekt thought with his head, not his feelings, and the redhead was acutely aware he swung way too far in the other direction.

Cool headâ€¦ don't feel, think. That's how this guy operates. Maybe I'll actually learn something if I try to steep to his level._

"O-okay, how so?"

Alekt glanced at him, and he thought he saw a flash of confusion. Maybe it was just his head playing tricks on him though. Maybe he wanted so desperately to see something there he could actually read that he was projecting emotions the guy probably didn't even have in him to use.

"My drawings are a little more technical than most of what my clan does. Less symbolic."

Embrik nodded, having seen the art done by his clan in stonework and paint. Crows were a common theme. Always with those stupid birds of theirs.

"And theseâ€¦ wing ideas of yoursâ€¦ you came up with them? Or is that a general goal for your whole clan, and I just haven't heard about it?"

"Just me. The wings were my idea. Hardly anyone else believes it will work, but that's why this is an experiment."

"So even amongst your own, you're the crazy one, huh?" Embrik humored.

"If that's the way you want to put it, then sure."

Embrik almost laughed aloud, for once the other's almost callous, matter-of-fact bluntness hilarious as he made this response with the straightest face a man could ever make. Maybe he was getting somewhere after all.

"What's it even like, in your clan? I meanâ€¦ in the land that's actually theirs." For once, Alekt's face looked somewhat thoughtful, which was the most he figured he'd ever actually gotten a glimpse of in the way of Alekt's expressions, which were always lacking. That was good, right?

"Just as cold as anywhere else in Norge," Alekt hummed. "High, surrounded by precarious cliffs, hazardousâ€¦ the wind and snow howl endlessly off the peaks, like a dragon's roar that never ends for all but the rarest, most peaceful of nights, when the silence becomes haunting."

Embrik could barely imagine such a place existing in this world, but he took up a seat before he consciously realized what he was doing, nodding his head indicatively.

"Tell me more."

8. Chapter 8

****A/N: ****For the record, this was a really hard chapter to write and took me FOREVER to put to words, but I'm pretty sure it's also the longest one so far. Dragon perspective's ain't easy to pull off, man! XD But the muses demanded I write this chapter and I do think the story needed it ^_^ Hopefully you guys will agree~

* * *

><p>Learning from the Masters
****A How To Train Your Dragon Fanfiction
>**Based of Le'Letha's "Nightfall"***

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><p>Toothless moaned a long, low sound and rolled over with pinched-closed eyes, trying in vain to be rid of the ache. Four days without even the smallest scrap of food was beginning to become intolerable and the dragon couldn't remember ever feeling so weak because of it. Even a tiny, meatless mouse would have been better than nothing at this point.<p>

The worst part wasn't the hunger itself or the weak feeling though, it was the plaintive, worried fear he could start to hear ebbing into Hiccup's calls to him that was the worst despite Toothless' efforts to assure his other half that he was _fine yes not hurt tired fine no worry safe only tired hungry fine_ but Hiccup knew he was lying and Toothless knew he was lying and his belly knew he was lying even more and punished his lying with pinching and angry demanding growling that only filling it could make stop and Toothless _would_ if he could but he couldn't with the cage trapping him and the jaw-shut thing and the binding thing that kept him tethered inside and because the _pfikingr_ _did not bring him fish to eat like they did some of the other dragons.

One of the only reliefs he managed to get from the hungry-pinching-growling was when he managed to doze off but even then the hunger pains were starting to interrupt even that and making every moment beyond uncomfortable. The water that the _pfikingr_ brought him daily helped a little bit for a short while but it didn't last long enough to make a difference.

The smell of fish and the sound of other cages being opened reached his nose and ears and it was enough to make his tongue water in overwhelming need for something to fill his belly but the Fury wasn't fool enough to hope he was going to get anything at this point, rolling back onto his belly and nestling his head between his paws and trying to find sleep if only to forget about being hungry for a while or to chase fish and prey-things in his dream and pretend he could get rid of the hungry-pinching-growling that way.

He was already there before long, hungrily hunting and chasing prey-things behind his eyelids and about to catch them when something flopped against his face outside his dreaming and the dragon sat bolt upright, forests and seas disappearing back into dark caves and weaving metal branches where the not-really-dragon-talking _pfikingr_ watched him from beyond.

Toothless' surprise-wide eyes wandered down to where a dead fish lay at his paws and his nose flared, blinking for a moment as though thinking he might still be dreaming. The hunger overwhelmed his senses though and he tried to grab it, only to remember the jaw-shut thing and shaking his head furiously, snorting angrily and narrowing his eyes at the _pfikingr_ as they slowly circled around the side of the cage, pushing the soft covering thing aside somewhat.

Toothless saw the _pfikingr_ wave another fish in hand at him in a taunting sort of way and Toothless narrowed his eyes more, refusing to move closer, but the _pfikingr_ didn't seem to catch the hint. They made a motion around their face and for a moment Toothless could only tilt his head in question, trying to figure out what the _pfikingr_ was doing and irately pawed at the jaw-trap thing seconds before it dawned on him, angling his eyes to try and look at the device without success.

Sniffing uncertainly, the dragon cautiously crawled closer, eyeing the _pfikingr_ with every bit of distrust he could muster, until he was within reach. He watched the human's every move as they dropped the second fish and used their skilled human paws to undo the jaw-shut trap and pull it fully away, rather than only loosen it, and Toothless couldn't be more happy or confused as he immediately backed away and shook his head a few times in relief to have it gone.

He immediately scarfed down the fish further away from the cage walls and eyed the _pfikingr_ appraisingly out of the corner of his eyes. The food dropping into his stomach was like a hard, painful rock at first but quickly gave way to a good food-filled feeling that almost made the dragon moan in content pleasure after having felt so empty for so long and immediately fixed his gaze on the second fish, creeping forward to snatch it up before retreating again and scarfing that one down as well, licking his lips in satisfaction.

The _pfikingr_ made a sound at him and drew the Fury's attention to another fish held by his paws but Toothless was in no way eager to get anywhere near him again, waiting for them to toss it to him from a distance again, but they did no such thing, indicating for him to come near again. Toothless snorted refusal and stayed where he was at a safe distance, waiting for the _pfikingr_ to lose patience and leave hopefully with dropping the fish where they were when he did but neither were willing to budge.

After a decent stretch of time, with neither Toothless having any intention of moving closer and the _pfikingr_ showing not even the slightest inclination to leave anytime soon, the dragon stretched out pressed against the bars on the opposite side and made himself comfortable, still watching the _pfikingr_ carefully and ready to wait up all night until they gave up if he had to. Two fish had hardly been enough to fill him up at all but now that he had eaten _something_ he could wait and bide his time as long as he needed.

After considerably longer had passed, the _pfikingr_ stood and Toothless watched him closely as he went to the front of the cage, then circled around to the same side, both with eyes locked on each other, but Toothless didn't move immediately, waiting to see what he was going to do. When the _pfikingr_ stretched a hand out to touch him, he noticeably growled and pushed himself up, moving to the other side of the cage and laying down the same way, pressed against the far side.

The not-really-dragon-speaker leaned against the bars and watched him, but didn't move to pursue again, tossing him one of the fish. Toothless snatched it up and ate it, but didn't take his eyes off the man even to blink. After some time had passed once more, the _pfikingr_ tried again, and Toothless moved once more as well, until they were once again at opposite ends, and repeated the same stand-off again a short while later, Toothless throating a smug sort of dragon sound at the tricky but not tricky enough _pfikingr_.

He could see the calculation in those sky-colored eyes and was admittedly interested though still wary of what the _pfikingr_ was going to do next and was trying to figure them out at the same time he could tell the human was trying to figure him out as well.

After some time deliberating, the _pfikingr_ moved to the front of

the cage and called out in his human gibberish until a couple of others of his own kind had gathered, talking to each other in their strange tongue. Those few moved away and returned with more thick, metal branches and circled around the cage, pulling the soft covering off entirely to settle on the ground behind the cage.

Toothless stood and eyed the group warily, tail slowly waving behind him nervously as he eyes the _pfikingr_ move around the outside of his cage. One circled around the back and grabbed the end of the binding thing that led to his neck and heaved, pulling the Fury around and shortening his reach to move about. The black dragon snarled angrily at them and resisted, so that others had to join in pulling him.

A scraping noise sounded behind him and he looked to see a few of the new metal branches being woven between those of his cage to make it smaller and he shrieked warning at them and heard his dragon-boy bark out a worried-questioning noise to him _Toothless worried angry Toothless hurt? Toothless hurt angry what wrong?_

The dragon was already busy gathering fire in his throat to answer and blasted one through a gap in the cage, sending the _pfikingr_ scattering with cries of fear and dismay as it barely missed and hit the rock wall behind them, screeching hatred at all of them with fully-bared teeth as he tried to turn and fire at them again, barely having the room to do that.

He snarled especially spitefully as green eyes landed on the not-really-dragon-speaking _pfikingr_ watching him and the fact that he didn't seem afraid at all as he should have been and instead only calculatedly blank only made the dragon angrier for some reason, gathering up more fire in the back of his throat to blast the tricky dangerous _pfikingr_ into oblivion.

He missed again as his enemy nimbly leapt away to the side and circled around, Toothless snarling rage and trying to turn after him, coming face-to-face with them and growling low and furious, though he couldn't angle himself right to fire another blast in the narrow maneuvering room that he had and was still struggling to fix that.

His shrieks died into a low, deadly growl that visibly rumbled through his entire chest, but the _pfikingr_ didn't seem to have enough sense to be healthily afraid of him and started up with that lying kind-of-dragon noises again, offering up _peace friendly peace calm peace calm_.

Toothless only continued to rumble a low, reverberating growl and glared distrust, the only thing at this point keeping the dumb human alive being the metal trappings of the cage. Otherwise he would have ripped the male apart much, much earlier and done so with a great amount of ease and no remorse at all.

What was even more ridiculously foolish was that the _pfikingr_ didn't seem wise enough to realize this fact and slowly reached a hand out towards his head, making those same cooing noises that were only lies to the dragon's ears and he snarled open rebellion at them, snapping the _pfikingr's_ arm with his teeth fully exposed and yanking him against the bars.

He was twistedly satisfied to hear the metal branches clang and watch the wince of pain twist its way across the stupid creature's face as the edges of the cage dug into his side, bracing one human paw against them but not trying to pull away, either because of fear or because he had figured out already that Toothless wasn't going to simply let him go and pulling away would be a bad idea that would only wound him since the dragon's teeth had hooked him but not broken flesh yet.

The other _pfikingr_s shouted and snarled at him, producing weapons and circling around to attack him with their sharp things. Toothless made a noise at the tricky one he'd trapped and their eyes met, staring at each other straight in the eye for a long moment.

So far the _pfikingr_ had not harmed any of the dragons and had even let some of them go though to what end the Fury still couldn't figure out but if he _really_ _intended not to be an enemy to dragons and was trying to talk to and understand them at all then he would realize Toothless' true intentions and he wouldn't let the other _pfikingr_ harm him.

Toothless could almost see the wheels in the _pfikingr_'s head turning as they stared at each other and tried to size the other up before they finally barked at the other _pfikingr_ in his human tongue and then snarled loudly when they didn't cease their charge so that they faltered and looked deeply conflicted about what to do, not retreating but likewise no longer advancing as they tried to figure out what was going on.

Toothless purred a brief moment of satisfaction but quickly stopped and yanked the man hard against the bars again when the tricky _pfikingr_ tried to pull away, growling subtly at him _you stay mine now stay listen free no listen stay mine you crazy tricky stay mine now until listen_.

Again came the _peace friendly calm friendly yes_ warbling and Toothless growled louder at him, digging his teeth in a little more until the _pfikingr_ fell silent, staring at him and waiting and hopefully listening which was good and satisfying.

Toothless had tried and frustratedly failed to properly communicate even though the stupid _pfikingr_ seemed to think he could talk to dragons and maybe he could fool dumber dragons but Toothless was proudly more clever than most of his kin and he wouldn't be placated by fake dragon-talking. They were going to communicate on _his_ _terms now and do it properly even if he had to hold the _pfikingr_ here for days until he finally learned.

Now that he actually had the _pfikingr_ where he needed him to be to force him to actually listen and understand though, he came to another problem. What did _pfikingr_ communicate, anyway? They were not the same as dragons and since this one clearly did not understand nearly as much as he tried to pretend that he did it was going to be hard to get him to know what Toothless actually wanted much less to get a proper response from him that would make sense to either of them.

He supposed that he would have to treat it the way that a dragon would treat a hatchling just out of its egg but even that was different because hatchlings heard dragon voices from the moment the

eggs were laid and were easy to teach but they were also not yet clever just like _pfikingr_ so maybe he could make his captive understand just very simple things and see where that got him first.

He tried to think and the simplest thing that came to mind first were the new branches that made his space too small to move properly and it seemed the most straight-forward thing to do and since the _pfikingr_ seemed to think Toothless was too dumb to know the difference between real dragon-speak and fake the Fury would merely have to show the _pfikingr_ how quickly clever and knowing of things he really was. If nothing else, it would be a test to see how clever and able to understand the tricky _pfikingr_ truly was and how much of his cleverness he might have been faking just like his dragon-talking.

Take free move these make bigger again move take he indicated as he pawed at the metal bars, giving his captive an imploring look and willing him to understand because if he couldn't even grasp something that simple then there was probably little hope he would understand anything else. He watched the _pfikingr_'s eyes flick between him and the bars and turned his head towards the other _pfikingr_ who still hadn't moved and were tensely watching as he spoke to them. Toothless watched them move warily around behind him on the other side of the cage, barely within his peripheral sight, and the metal branches moved and soon disappeared, giving him back some proper room to move and stretch out his wings and tail.

He purred approval but didn't let the _pfikingr_ free yet, trying to think of how to proceed from there that wouldn't be too complicated for him to grasp and was glad that the _pfikingr_ seemed content to wait without rushing things even if it was only because he could probably sense that Toothless wasn't ready to let him go and trying to force himself free would be a futile endeavor.

He supposed the next easiest thing to try and communicate would be the binding thing on his neck though he wasn't sure that the _pfikingr_ would do that but if Toothless didn't give him a choice then he would have to if he expected to ever get his arm back and the Fury fully intended on using that to his advantage.

He planted a paw on the chain and indicated with a glance of his eyes, since that seemed to work fairly well so far, growling softly _this too free off free this off too_.

There was a noticeably moment of thoughtful hesitance, where Toothless wasn't sure if it was unease or lack of understanding that brought about still silence. After a brief lapse of time, the _pfikingr_ looked at a loss, his lips twitching like he wanted to try to say something but having no idea how to do it. At the very least, he seemed to be _truly_ thinking about how to communicate rather than placate which was a small step in the right direction and Toothless rumbled in imploring encouragement though the realization that he was trying to _talk_ to a _pfikingr_ of all the dumb things was never once far from his mind.

Hiccup didn't really count. He was sort-of _pfikingr_ in body but in heart and soul and speech he was all dragon and Toothless' other half and the Fury would never think of him as anything less than a dragon.

They were interrupted as one of the other _pfikingr_ started to speak from a distance at him and his captive talked back but Toothless could make no sense of it. He swelled slightly with hope that the binding thing was about to come off, but it never did, and Toothless guessed that the thing the _pfikingr_ wanted to communicate and couldn't was that he wasn't going to be taking it off, much to the Fury's chagrin.

The dragon perked slightly as the _pfikingr_ finally said something that he truly understood: his name. He blinked invitingly and waited for the _pfikingr_ to continue, but once again he looked lost, concentrating hard on how to proceed.

The human shifted slightly and gave just enough of a tug on his arm that Toothless could feel it and the speech wasn't really there but they made a sound and he could still read the intention of what the _pfikingr_ wanted to say and trying to get permission to have his arm back.

Toothless tugged back and snorted refusal _no stay mine now listen still stay mine no you stay here._

He craned his head slightly as Hiccup confusedly called to him from his own cage a little further off, having been chattering off and on at him for a short while now though Toothless had been focused on his captive.

Who yours who Toothless-love fine maybe not hurt yes who yours?

Toothless purred smugly back _tricky dragon liar speaking caught yes I caught proud have mine hunted got human mine proud stay caught free maybe you me we us yes maybe caught proud us free maybe yes._

The dragon's attention turned back to the _pfikingr_ as they repeated his name again and then made a motion with their head, looking elsewhere. Toothless made a noise of question and the _pfikingr_ repeated it, but Toothless still wasn't sure what he wanted. After a few more tries and some slight frustration later, he thought maybe the _pfikingr_ was trying to ask something about his dragon-boy though that seemed a little bit odd because he would probably have an easier time communicating bigger specifics with his other half than he would with Toothless himself. Unless that was what the _pfikingr_ was trying to say was that he would rather try talking to Hiccup but Toothless could not be sure.

Seeming to realize that his attempts to communicate were getting him nowhere, the _pfikingr_ indicated towards Toothless with one hand and said his name again, then made a motion over his shoulder and a noise of question.

After a time though, Toothless lost patience and snorted, shaking his head abruptly and giving the _pfikingr_ a look.

This communication thing was really not working out all that well. Why did he ever hope a _pfikingr_ could understand or speak to him at all? Even if they were trying to understand, it was useless. _Pfikingr_ were too dumb to understand or speak right.

He flexed his jaw slightly but didn't let the _pfikingr_ go just yet, trying to think of it there was anything else he could do while he still had the male caught.

Hiccup would have had much better luck trying to make sense and make the _pfikingr_ hear them but since his dragon-boy and him were apart then that made things more difficult and more frustrating but perhaps he could fix that and even get them free and tucked the _pfikingr_'s arm as he tilted his head towards the door in indication.

The _pfikingr_ took no time at all to figure it out but still didn't show that he would let the Fury go though Toothless had not expected him to easily and tried to think of how he might convince the other and decided his best bet would be to do similar as the _pfikingr_ had done and started to warble those same sort of reassuring sounds back in question _friendly peace no harm yes? Friendly no harm free friendly good will be trust yes?_

The _pfikingr_ stared at him for a long moment in thought and Toothless could sense his wariness but they replied to him _friendly peace yes friendly_ but didn't carry on with it for long as if not sure if that was what Toothless wanted to hear back.

Toothless once again purred with approval and loosened his hold after a moment so that the _pfikingr_ was free to pull away finally and bark something at the other _pfikingr_ who soon hesitantly left to go elsewhere though they were still nervously watching from a distance away. The _pfikingr_ circled around and Toothless rumbled eagerly to see the cage opened but they stopped before reaching the door and instead settled to sit to the side of the cage.

Toothless turned his head rapidly between the cage door and _pfikingr_ a few times expectantly and tried to look as non-threatening and friendly as possible but they only made another noise at him that sounded like refusal and shook their head.

The dragon growled and flattened his ears back testily.

Bad tricked pfikingr tricked me bad not fair supposed to free you tricky bad you!

Either out of lack of understanding or lack of caring, the _pfikingr_ simply shrugged at him and took one of the fish from the _pfikingr_ carrying thing and held it out, though without getting close enough that Toothless could grab him through the bars again. The Fury gave him an angry look and grabbed the fish, yanking it back with a tantruming harshness and scarfing it down with a glare at them and considered blasting them with fire but from what he'd seen so far this one _pfikingr_ was the really the only one that cared for keeping the other humans from harming the dragons and dragon-boy so he second-guessed the impulse and instead only fantasized doing it. Over and over and over again until not even bones were left.

The _pfikingr_ offered up another fish but Toothless didn't take it, glaring an _I'm-still-very-mad-at-you_ kind of glare and snorting loudly to accentuate the look.

After a short while longer, the _pfikingr_ tossed the rest of the fish in at the edge of the cage and Toothless contemplated grabbing him through the bars again but didn't and watched as the _pfikingr_

sat down to watch him again.

Before much more time had passed, Toothless perked as he watched a black shape soar past and land on the _pfikingr_'s shoulder and croak obnoxiously a few times. Only then did the human gaze leave him and instead go to the annoying black bird, warbling those sounds that were kind-of-but-not-dragon at it and the bird chattered back at him both noisily and quietly and nibbled at him with its long, sharp mouth and coo noises of affection and then craned its head forward as the _pfikingr_ scratched behind its feathery head with one paw so that the bird crooned contently and snuggled up to the _pfikingr_'s neck.

It was a curious thing watching and listening to the human and crow interact in both bird-speak and some human-speak thrown in seamlessly and vaguely reminded the Fury of his own interactions with his dragon boy even though Hiccup was somewhat human in body only even though Toothless never really thought of him that way and even though Toothless didn't talk to birds or " before today " humans, he could pick out most of what they were probably communicating and that they really did understand each other and weren't just pretending the way that the _pfikingr_ had tried to pretend with him.

For the first time he might've understood what it could have been like for the _pfikingr_ like the She-_pfikingr_ or the red-furred Alpha to watch him and his dragon-boy together without really fully understanding their talk or mannerisms but knowing that they were close and understood each other even if no one else did and the Fury was interestedly content to watch for a while up until the _pfikingr_ caught him staring and he pointedly glared again and turned away trying to act disinterested but failing as he kept watching them out of the corner of one jade eye.

Now the _pfikingr_ was watching him again and turned away to lift his paw to his mouth and make a long, shrill noise that made Toothless' ears sting and the dragon gave him a dirty as well as confused look because he had not heard _pfikingr_ made such a strange noise before.

He quickly forgot that as he heard a heavy _clack-clock-clack_-ing noise and one of the strange _preynoprey_ creatures appeared from further away in the cage and was quickly gaining distance toward them and Toothless became increasingly wary as he stood and watched the _crazy strange hunting preynoprey crazy thing_ come uncomfortably close, stopping just short of the _pfikingr_ and shaking itself alertly.

Toothless eyed the animal and flared his nose and the _preynoprey_ eyed him and flared its even bigger nose back as both creatures sized each other up. The _pfikingr_ stood now, though he was still heavily dwarfed by the _preynoprey_ and scratched its neck with one paw down to a hefty shoulder and the strange beast craned its head around and rubbed it against the _pfikingr_'s back but didn't make much noise other than soft, bellowing breaths as its body rippled in an odd way down its back.

Unlike with the crow, the _pfikingr_ spoke only on his own strange human tongue as he gently pushed the _preynoprey_ back and made small motions with his paws and the _preynoprey_ turned as if to leave but instead only spun all the way around with a little more distance and

then posed and held itself that way other than angling its ears and watching Toothless through the cage and Toothless stared back at it with increasing fascination and only a hint more bravery but he could still remember fighting the creature that was at least as large as him and remember it lunging with teeth that weren't sharp but they were big and hard, lashing claws like rocks on the ends of its paws that had left him dizzy and hurting.

The _pfikingr_ reached a hand out to touch the top of its head and it bowed its neck and walked forward slowly as the human talked to it until it had come closer to the bars and flared its nose at Toothless to take in his scent. The dragon wasn't as eager or ready to get close but the _pfikingr_ made a reassuring noise at him " that he now recognized wasn't dragon-speak but bird-speak though they were somewhat similar " and a motion that he recognized the _Uh st-r-r-r-TT _did at Hiccup before that was supposed to mean _come here_ but the Fury was reluctant.

Toothless eyed the creature warily and chattered _wary alert crazy strange preynoprey danger alert caution strange?_ but the _pfikingr_ continued to try and reassure him and still had a hand on the weird thing and was perhaps calming it with stroking touches on its neck and maybe to make it go away if it wasn't friendly but Toothless could not be sure.

With a low growl of uncertainty, Toothless slowly crept forward though he still kept some distance and eyed its sharp rock-claw paws and was ready to retreat at the faintest sign of danger as he craned his head and flared his nose to take in its odd scent that was mixed with human smell and the smallest scent of other dead prey-things like dragons often had on their breath but the smell was on its fur instead of its nose or mouth.

The _preynoprey_ thing didn't lash out and only continued to sniff and snort at him curiously with ears and head angled forward and Toothless found some of his confidence returning and sniffed closer until their noses were almost touching though he was not bold enough to get any closer to such an odd creature that should have been a scared prey-thing but wasn't and even chased and fought dragons and _won_.

After Toothless drank its scent into his nose and it probably had done the same it lifted its head and gazed elsewhere in a relaxed, disregarding sort of fashion and after the _pfikingr_ patted and scratched it with his paws and spoke to it the strange _preynoprey_ creature began to walk away to the far end of the cave again with Toothless still watching it and almost somewhat disappointed to see the odd animal leave before he could figure out more about it since Toothless had never seen these sort of creatures before having come to this cave amongst these particular _pfikingr_.

The bird-speaker crouched down aside his cage now and caught Toothless' eyes, the dragon more simply cautious and curious than wary or distrusting but he still wasn't relaxed or trusting enough to give the _pfikingr_ contact or let them touch him as they held one paw out invitingly for him to get close to and instead snatched up the fish and dragged them to the other side to finish eating.

The _pfikingr_ seemed to either catch the hint or had grown tired of trying to get close so they stood and instead moved away at last to

leave the dragon to eat in peace and solitude.

9. Chapter 9

****Learning from the Masters**
>A How To Train Your Dragon Fanfiction**
>Based of Le'Letha's "Nightfall"****

* * *

><p>Alekt huffed softly and massaged his arm as he walked away, easily getting the attention of a few men since they had not once stopped watching him and the dragon ever since he shoed them away, staring as though they expected him to magically disappear in a puff of smoke any second now.<p>

"Pull the cloth back over the cage, to where it was before."

The men wordlessly nodded in a stupor, glancing over him appraisingly as they passed, as though trying increasingly hard to find some body part or limb missing. The only thing _Tt-th-ss_ " as the dragon-boy called it and the dragon responded to " had done was leave shallow teeth-marks with the points of his fangs. Likely all traces of the encounter would disappear within days. Nothing to worry over or write home about.

"Y-you-!" Alekt hummed in question and turned his head to Embrik, who was glaring at him through an arsenal of mixed emotions, though mostly anger and disbelief. "What in Helheim were you thinking? Do you have even the slightest damn clue just how stupid and reckless that was?" When Alekt didn't even humor him with a response, only a calm, indifferent stare, Embrik continued. "You know what I'm talking about! Acting all nonchalant like that and letting that freaking dragon keep a hold on you! I can't believe you did that! You should have just let the men take care of that beast with swords and axes!"

"And what would that have accomplished, exactly?" Alekt tilted his head faintly.

Embrik gaped and stuttered at him, unable to come up with something comprehensible for several moments.

"Of all the hair-brained" Are you _completely insane_? I mean does the concept of danger or common sense actually mean anything to you? Your arm. Was in the mouth. Of a _Night Fury_!"

"And yet, here it still is," Alekt mused, holding up his arm for Embrik to see and wiggling his fingers. That only made Embrik more furious, as if taking the motion as a taunt.

"That's not the point!" Embrik fumed. "Oh, but what do you care? You've not once given a single rat dropping for the danger or risk, have you? Hardly even for yourself, as far as I can tell, and certainly not for anyone else around you!"

Alekt only continued to stare for a moment, Embrik visibly fighting to find some proper way to channel his temper, before the brunette shrugged and turned away, starting to walk.

"It's not the risks that concern me. In the end, it's results that matter."

"Why I outta-"

Alekt heard the movements behind him at the exact second as his crow companion cawed a warning and took flight off of his shoulder, already maneuvering to dodge the oncoming punch before he had fully swiveled around to face the attacking redhead.

He dodged low and easily underneath the swing, sweeping around Embrik's side until he was behind the other. He grabbed a tight fistful of hair at the same moment he knocked the slightly younger man's legs out from under him with one of his own, slamming him flat into the ground, and sat atop his shoulders with the heel of one boot pinning a hand against the ground.

The brunette knew he hadn't managed to knock the other out when he felt Embrik go rigid as one of his blades, a short-handled, black sickle, found his throat warningly, before the fool even had the chance to attempt struggling free.

Alekt could feel the surrendering tension in the other's body under him, as well as the fact that Embrik barely even dared to breathe, completely still with fear. Exactly as he rightly should have been, after the stupid stunt he'd just pulled.

"I can drop a fully grown horse onto its side and remind it who's in charge in thirty seconds flat when it fools itself into thinking it can take dominance by force. Dropping you is much more effortless by comparison," he told him coldly.

Embrik didn't move or speak, but Alekt could feel the faintest shiver that ran up his spine. Despite that Alekt was actually smaller and lighter, Embrik didn't even try to throw him off, seeming to have forgotten this fact quite quickly and easily.

"You can think what you want of me, sneer at me, despise me, question me, insult me, and none of it matters," Alekt stated apathetically, before leaning in close to Embrik's ear, dropping his voice into a promising, deadly hiss. "-but if you ever decide to test your luck and attack me again, especially from behind, you're going to walk away with more wounds than just the ones to your pride, if you walk away at all."

Just as quickly as he'd thrown Embrik to the ground and left him with this one and only warning, he was up again and walking away as though nothing at all had taken place, sheathing his blades. Embrik, however, took quite a few minutes longer before he felt brave enough to even sit up from where he still lay.

* * *

><p>Alekt sighed and rubbed the back of his neck as he returned from checking some of the work the men had reported was finished. All of the entrances they could find were checked and sealed up, good and tight, so no more dragons or potential dragon-riders could hide above them, ready to swoop down. Their rations were stocked well enough for a few days. There was no signs of immediate trouble that needed their

attention.<p>

Of course, he wasn't fool enough to think they could relax. Finding confrontation was not an _if_ scenario, it was a matter of when. Keeping the men alert and ready until trouble presented itself was going to be the trick. The longer nothing happened, the more lax they would become.

At least the caged dragons kept the men somewhat on their toes. It was one of the few reasons he didn't try to talk them out of their fear of the beasts, instead manipulating their instincts to be ready for danger, only from a perceived force rather than the real one.

He stuffed a few papers, some blank and others not, under his arm and grabbed a chair with another to haul towards the one cage that held something other than a dragon. He was sure the occupant didn't believe he wasn't, though.

He pulled the cloth aside from it and was immediately being watched by the figure within, two eyes equally as green as the Fury's. Unlocking and swinging the cage door open, he set the chair inside backward-facing and rested his arms over the top.

"Hello," he greeted. The dragon-man watched him warily from a distance, though Alekt had made it a point to set his chair outside the reach of the chain, by just a little bit. He noted those hues scouring his form and hovering for a moment over the sickle at his side, Alekt following his eyes.

"So you saw that, did you?" Alekt mused, though he already knew the man probably didn't understand him very well, if at all. He'd learned the past couple days, with the few remotely human sounds that he'd gotten out of him, that the dragon-man's vocabulary was increasingly limited. Alekt knew three year old children who knew more words. That was going to be troublesome, but probably not nearly as hard as trying to communicate with the Fury had been. That had been a truly frustrating experience, and Alekt didn't get frustrated easily. Not even by a tiny prick.

The dragon was intelligent, which could bode either good _or_ bad for them, but perhaps they could find some sort of middle ground to work together. So far, the dragon-rider was looking to be that middle-ground. If he could only get them to understand each other.

When the man's eyes stopped watching his sheathed blades worriedly, they went to the paper Alekt had in interest. The last time he'd tried to talk to the wild-man, he'd made a few noises, a few very clumsy words. It had taken him a while, but Alekt had finally figured out that what the man was interested in was the paper.

Once he'd figured that out, he knew how he was going to proceed this time, hoping for the best.

"You want this?" Alekt indicated, waving the sheets of paper faintly. The way that the man's eyes followed them like a dog watching a fresh steak was mildly amusing. It seemed he liked paper. "You do, don't you?"

There was a moment of thoughtfulness and concentration, like the man

was trying hard to understand and figure out what he was trying to say, before he answered in what might have been Nordic, though it was heavily broken and clumsily spoken.

"Isss."

"Then I'll give it," Alekt said, careful to enunciate and give a little time for the man to at least attempt processing what he was saying. "But first you help me with something." His words didn't seem to reach anywhere that understood, so he decided to continue on without repeating.

Alekt pointed somewhere to the side, questioning, "The dragon, his name is _Tt-th-ss_?"

The man perked slightly, and it only seemed to take him a few seconds to understand parts of it, at least, though he said nothing, as if still trying to decipher exactly what he was asking and to see if Alekt would try to communicate again. "The dragon is _Tt-th-ss_?" he repeated.

"Isss. Drakkkn, _Tt-th-ss_!" the man chirped. He seemed to get joy and excitement out of anything involving that dragon, even the vaguest mention of him.

Alekt nodded. "Okay. So, _Tt-th-ss_, dragon's name," he indicated with a small, sideways motion. Next, he vaguely waved towards the man indicatively. "And your name isâ€|?"

That was the point at which he lost him again, but Alekt was patient. Maybe he should try something else. He made a motion again sideways, repeating _Tt-th-ss_, then to himself as he vocalized, "Alekt", and then motioned to the man again.

It took a few more moments of thought, before the man caught on, and made a noise, sort of a click and then a pop. Alekt had a small bit of trouble with it at first, but noticed the man brighten slightly when he got closer to the same noise.

"_(click)-uhp?_"

"Isss!" the man yelped happily. Alekt nodded, taking a sheet of paper, and holding it out.

"Good." The man â€" _(click)-uhp_ â€" eyed the paper in a way that was both wary and wanting, but he didn't move closer. Just like his dragon, he was being careful, and distrustful. He supposed that was only natural, and fair, at this point.

Despite his unwillingness to get closer, Alekt could see how much he wanted the sheet, but Alekt wasn't going to compromise on this one. Either he had to come forward, or he wouldn't get it. _(click)-uhp_ was watching the paper, but Alekt saw his eyes wander and stop at the indents in his arm with a knowing sort of look that made him shift uneasily. He was sure the man recognized the teeth-marks of his own pet dragon, and became more wary than before.

It wasn't bad at all, barely having scratched the surface. Alekt knew that the Fury could have done a lot more damage, or probably taken his arm entirely, if the dragon had sincerely wanted to. It had been

a conscious choice on the reptile's part to leave him with little more than a prick. He was sure _(click)-uhp _knew that he would have been much worse off if _Tt-th-ss_ had intended on it, too.

Alekt only shrugged.

"It's not bad. _Tt-th-ss_ was only scolding me." That was as close and simple as he could think to describe it anyway. The Fury didn't like to be touched; he knew that. He had pressed his luck when trying, when the dragon was no longer muzzled and then cornered. But the dragon had still only left him with what basically amounted to a warning.

_(click)-uhp _looked as though he was trying to decipher what he'd said, but only caught hints. Either way, Alekt was sure that his disregard of it probably got the message across, if not the words. He couldn't be sure, though.

There was a look of intense concentration on the dragon-man's face for a long while, and he looked to be struggling with something internally, before he finally tried to speak again. Mostly it was animal sounds he could barely make sense of, but it was questioning, and he caught "drakkkn" in there somewhere, those feral hues shifting to the other cages lined up next to his.

Alekt didn't have a difficult time guessing what he wanted, turning his head.

"We'reâ€¦" he paused, trying to find a simple way of explaining. He wasn't used to having to dumb down his speech, but he had no choice in this instance. "-catching dragonsâ€¦ to help us create something. We're learning, using them. When we're done, we let them go free." At least half of his words were wasted breath, as was evident by the confused concentration on _(click)-uhp_'s face. He truly wasn't sure how to simplify it more than that and still get his message across.

He supposed he'd have to adjust his tactics â€" again.

He held up one of the pieces of paper. One of the ones that was marked with sketches. _(click)-uhp _brightened and became more focused. The thing on the page was a sketch of a dragon from above, with its wings splayed out, and markings for dimensions and scale.

"I need dragons to make these," he said, pointing and hoping that the two together would make the man understand a little better. After _(click)-uhp_ had stared for a good while, he shifted it to the back, to show him a new one, this time of a different species of dragon, and another one after that. "Then, I let them go free," he said, motioning over his shoulder to the cave entrance. "You understand?"

"Isss," _(click)-uhp _responded.

"Good." Alekt nodded approval. "And I need these-" he motioned to the drawings of dragons again, then flipped to other ones. This time, it was preliminary sketches, basically blueprints, of designs for artificial wings. "To make these. Wings. For Vikings to fly. You understand?"

_(click)-uhp _looked perplexed, and Alekt wasn't sure if he didn't understand the words, or if he didn't understand what " or _why_ " they were trying to do that. Either one was a fair guess.

Either way, he almost wriggled eagerly where he was as he eyed them, like he wanted to pounce all over them, and whined in an anxious-eager sort of manner as though he couldn't decide between his desire to see them closer or his sense of caution and self-preservation.

_(click)-uhp _pointed somewhere at the floor, uttering, "Kkh-fff?" Alekt had no idea what that was supposed to mean, and the man was quickly losing patience with him, looking up at him rather than the paper now, though his eyes still occasionally flicked to them. This time he made a motion, toward himself, but then at the same spot again, and repeated himself. "Kkh-fff?"

Alekt had to think on that a moment more, trying to place a word to the sounds. He tried going down a list of words starting with the first sound and line one up, but nothing came immediately to mind that would fit the situation. But he did recall the way that the man said 'dragon', and thought maybe it was an entirely different starting sound he meant. Okay, so a 'g' sounding word, perhaps?

He rolled the sounds over and over on his tongue silently, and realized what it was.

"Give?" he tried, watching the man perk slightly and motion again more insistently, purring approvingly.

"Kkh-fff!"

Alekt held them out, but _(click)-uhp_'s temper flared, looking impatient.

"Nuh! Herrrr-" he motioned at the floor again, about halfway between them. "Kkh-fff!"

"No," Alekt stated, crisply and clearly. "You come here. _Then_, I give."

That much, the man understood, huffing audibly in disdain and further growing impatience.

"Nuh!"

"Then I won't give," Alekt stated simply, ignoring the dirty look he was receiving. It didn't matter either way. Alekt could wait. He didn't think the man was anywhere near as patient as his dragon would be. Not with the way that he'd been eyeing the papers.

And he was right. After a great stretch of time had passed, with _(click)-uhp _trying to be angry, trying to pretend to ignore him, and trying to act like he was no longer interested and chatter to his dragon two cages away, he crept slightly closer. Only by two steps, but closer, still. His curiosity was greater than his stubbornness.

"Kkh-fff?" he indicated, though he stayed where he was, still

maintaining some distance. Alekt eyed him levelly and held them out.

"Come here, and you can have them."

(click)-uhp eyed him and chattered nervously, the Fury answering him, and didn't move even an inch forward for a good few minutes. His eyes once again lingered on the blades at Alekt's side in a vulnerable sort of uncertainty, but when he seemed to deem it not immediately risky, he crept forward, one small bit at a time. When he reached out his chained hands, he touched the paper's edge then immediately jumped back, watching to see if something would happen, as though expecting a trap, and chattering more dragonic sounds.

When Alekt didn't so much as twitch, he moved closer again, reaching out. He froze when he touched the edge of the paper again, watching Alekt intently and barely breathing at all. Then, when he deemed it okay, he abruptly yanked the papers away and retreated to the far end away from Alekt, still eyeing him as he crouched down in the corner. Still making those same bestial noises.

When he finally relaxed somewhat, and his attention turned to the paper clutched in his hands, the noises didn't stop, only quieted slightly, as his eyes traced the drawings in child-like fascination. Alekt could almost see the man's mind working, making sense of what he was seeing with a great sense of interest and perhaps even outward excitement.

As far as the blue-eyed brunette was concerned, that was good. Very good indeed.

When _(click)-uhp_ finally stopped being transfixed by the drawings, he looked back up at Alekt with mixed emotions that were overcast by confusion and worry. Alekt figured that the man had probably managed to figure out _what_ he wanted using the dragons, now. The part that he likely didn't know was the _why_.

That was going to be a lot harder to explain.

He heard _(click)-uhp_ make a noise of question that needed no greater translation.

"It would help us. Something to help us live better. To make sure we don't die as much."

"Drakkkn?" the feral inquired, increasing concern etching his features.

"No, not to use against dragons. Other Vikings. They're our biggest enemies. It would help us fight and live." Again, most of his words were lost, but the other relaxed slightly. He seemed to understand at least that Alekt wasn't out to go after, fight, and kill dragons. It was probably a fair guess that _(click)-uhp_ had been worried about that for a long time, but of course, most people, Viking or otherwise, were actively against dragons.

(click)-uhp spoke to him again, "Drakkkn-", something he couldn't understand, then questioning, "_(click)-uudt? Bad?"

"Do I think the dragons are good or bad?" He received a small, indicative nod, _(click)-uhp_ watching him carefully. Alekt closed his eyes for a moment and hummed. "Such a subjective question, isn't it?" He opened his eyes again, only met with a frustrated stare as his words were once again lost to the man's limited range of language. "Dragonsâ€| Vikingsâ€| no one is good or bad, really. Everyone's just trying to live." When he was met with more confusion, he clarified, "No good. No bad. Just trying not to die, right?"

He thought maybe the man understood a little more than anything he'd said previously and looked down at the paper, though it was more as if he was looking through it, at something else beyond. What he'd said had obviously struck a chord somewhere, but for what reason or what sort of chord, Alekt had no idea.

Extending his hand, Alekt motioned, catching _(click)-uhp_'s attention as he spoke.

"Give." The dragon-man eyed him again warily, but crept closer. Still cautious, but slightly quicker than the first time, extending the papers, just until Alekt had a hold on them, then quickly retreated again.

Re-organizing them, Alekt shifted his eyes to _(click)-uhp_, who was still watching him carefully.

"Hungry?" When he was met with a confused stare, he thumbed over his shoulder towards the fire. "Hungry? Fish? Meat?"

"Isss! Fssshh!"

Alekt merely nodded and stood, taking his paper and chair to put away, before he'd go and get something for the man to eat.

* * *

><p>"Anything interesting to report from the patrol?" Alekt questioned as he met with the returning party who had went to make sure nothing around the island seemed amiss.<p>

"There was a trade ship that came through earlier today, coming from the east. We saw it on the waters and waved it down," one of the men stated.

"And?"

"Not much to say, but he said there's another band of people in the area, a few miles away. Trappers. 'been catching and slaying dragons all over the waters and coasts nearby."

Alekt hummed, placing a hand to his chin in thought.

" 'might not like competition," the man continued. "You know how some of these trappers are. And if they find out we have aâ€|a Night Furyâ€|"

Alekt nodded his head, dropping his arms back to his side.

"What sort of trappers? Live or dead catches?"

The man shifted uncertainly. "I'mâ€| not sure, sir, but probably dead."

"Maybe," Alekt hummed. "Did you ask what sort of traps they're using?"

"All kinds. Steel traps, nets, snares, pitsâ€|"

Alekt nodded his head. It was impossible to distinguish for certain. The likeliest was that the dragons were killed, but not every trapper slayed dragons. At least not immediately. Those with enough experience and gal sometimes took live ones, especially babies or fledglings. Live dragons could be used for a lot of things. Some could be turned loose on enemies. Other times, they took them to pits to use to train young ones or for entertainment. Very rarely, they sold them to collectors and those who liked their exotic pets. It was almost entirely unheard of, but it did happen from time to time.

"Perhapsâ€| we should consider picking up and moving, sir?" one of the others suggested subtly. "They could interfere with our work, or even kill us for our catches."

"No," Alekt stated with finality, raising a hand to still any further suggestions or protests.

Already his mind was hard at work trying to piece together how he could exploit this new development. He needed an opportunity to gain the cooperation of the dragon-rider and his Fury, and he had to do it quickly before further trouble could befall them. That opportunity was almost falling right into his lap. All he had to do was manipulate it to his advantage.

"I think this might just work to our favor." He fixed azure hues on the both of them. "Where did the trader say they were camped?"

10. Chapter 10

****A/N:**** We're at about that half-way mark, maybe closer, to being done with this fic ^_^ Also, I have some art of Alekt and his horse, Sangrida, on DA which is linked on my profile page here on FFN, if anyone wants to go and check it out~

* * *

><p>Learning from the Masters
****A How To Train Your Dragon Fanfiction
>**Based of Le'Letha's "Nightfall"***

* * *

><p>What met Hiccup's senses at first was not the becoming-familiar scene of light poking in through openings between metal branches or the sounds of his Toothless-heart-of-mine crooning socially at him or the mixed smell of pfikingr_ and fire and nearby dragons and stone and a faint tinge of salty water on the breeze or the unmoving ground of a cold metal floor.

It was the darkness of something that clung to his face and a

cracking-creaking noise like swaying trees and the overpowering smell of wet wood and _pfikingr_ and salt and fish as he felt the ground pitch and sway in nauseating tandem beneath him.

His head felt _strange tired blurry_ and despite how much he tried to search his memory he couldn't remember anything after eating another fish that the _E-e-kTT_ had brought him that tasted kind of strange but not bad-strange and being overcome by sudden exhaustion that wouldn't let go despite that he tried not to sleep.

His front paws were still bound together, but instead of in front of him so he could still mostly use them they were behind his back and left him feeling more vulnerable than ever and he had to resist whimpering because he could not see and he could not move well and did not know where he was or what had happened or what was going on.

And then it hit him that he doesn't know if he's alone but he knows he doesn't smell dragons at all and he mewled out plaintatively _Toothless? Where Toothless here yes?_

He wasn't answered and the same strange _sickshiveringcoldnotcold_ feeling from the first night he and Toothless had been forced apart was hitting him like a wave all over again and making him tremble but he had been getting kind-of used to being apart and been able to get rid of the bad shivering and heart-cold knowing that his Toothless_-minelove_ was not hurt and they were still close enough to talk and reassure each other and he yearned to be physically close to his other half but he could tolerate their separateness somewhat so long as he and his other and the dragons were not being hurt.

This time was different and far worse. Toothless was nowhere to be heard or smelled or seen and Hiccup had no idea at all what had happened to him and if he was alive or hurt or even killed or left somewhere without him but _E-e-kTT_ had promised that he would not hurt dragons but even dragons lied so _pfikingr_ could lie too and what was to say it had not been a lie and Hiccup had simply been _foolish reckless bad dumb_ to believe him?

Toothless had good ears and Hiccup thought he could have answered but he tried again louder, crying out _Toothless here love here where you me here safe not hurt yes Toothless-love mine here!_

Still there was no answer and the bad feeling in him grew and he struggled and writhed and cried out and breathed too fast and too hard until his head swam dizzingly so he had to stop and then tried again when his head felt less light and he didn't stop again even when his throat started to ache because he was _COMPLETELY_ _alone_ without his other half there and could not hear or smell or taste or see him in a strange place he didn't know and did not know if his Toothless_-self needed him or not and E-e-kTT had really just been _bad lie tricky hurt separate bad pfikingr take Toothless-love bad lie lie enemy_ and he and his other heart could not live separate because they had to be _TOGETHER_ and it was wrong not to be because they were never apart and were not meant to be apart and always, _always, ALWAYS, __**ALWAYS**_ together no matter what badness happened and it felt like his neck was in a hanging-holding trap so that he could scarcely _breathe_ and it was _all, too, MUCH._

He froze as the ground jolted him slightly and there were many, many

scraping noises from beneath him like tens of dragons scratching from beneath him and he tried to breathe though it hurt to try and listen to all the scratching and rolling of the ground in anxiety-ridden curiosity and called out again for Toothless but neither his dragon-half nor any other dragons answered him and the ground suddenly stopped moving and there were loud steps and odd screeching noises like those of the cage doors that Hiccup had learned to recognize and grabbing of above his front paws so that he was lifted off the ground and he knew the smell and sound of _pfikingr_ and snarled and fought anew and blindly tried to bite the rough _pfikingr_ paws that pulled him forward from each side but he couldn't find flesh.

The stuffy wet-wood air became more clear and he could feel wind and faint sunlight on his fur and chattered _nervous worry scared strange where confused alert frightened alone Toothless gone nervous bad very bad_.

He heard a sound now that was finally familiar, that _stonesick_ voice of E-e-kTT from not far, speaking in the _pfikingr_ tongue, and then the face-clinging thing came off and Hiccup had to squint and blink as his eyes adjusted to the sudden onslight of light and open sky and rocky coast and trees that were not familiar to him and E-e-kTT watching him in that way that made it impossible to read any sort of feeling or thoughts off him like he could with most everything else that spoke with their eyes and body and tone.

The binding-things came off of his front paws and he wasted not a second in flinging himself away from the _pfikingr_ once he was partially free and whirled and snarled and looked for his dragon-half but Toothless was nowhere to be seen.

He didn't get to think on it long because something came flying towards him and he ducked back and eyed his claws that sat now in front of him and then to E-e-kTT who was watching him stone-faced.

Hiccup wasted no time in taking those and slipping them on and it was _so _good to be free of cages and binding-things and have his claws back but he was still without Toothless so nothing was really alright and not much better than before at all.

Toothless where take you no hurt better not where love tricky liar enemy where Toothless-mine where! he demanded angrily but E-e-kTT was not listening and turned to say something to his other _pfikingr_ and made Hiccup even more anxious-furious and the dragon-man let out a roar and leapt at him and pushed him into the rock. E-e-kTT did not go down easily and rolled him over and flipped Hiccup through the air with his feet and was back to his own even before Hiccup was.

The dragon-man's eyes only briefly flitted to the side but the other _pfikingr_ did not move to attack though they looked as if they wanted to and why that was Hiccup had no idea unless they thought this was an Alpha's challenge because so far it seemed like E-e-kTT was the Alpha " _Chfff?_ " of these _pfikingr_ even though he was much smaller and younger and lighter than any of them but Hiccup had learned both from experience and from watching that he was cleverer and quicker and more skilled and could even talk almost-dragon a little bit so maybe that was how he was their Alpha whereas most other _pfikingr_ were clumsy and slow and not very smart at all and

could not speak even _close _to right so Hiccup would have to be extra careful but he would still not back down because he was still a _dragon_ and one that could take on a Queen and challenge a _pfikingr_ Alpha and he was not afraid!

They circled a few steps, watching each other, but Hiccup was frustratedly unable to read E-e-kTT's face for his intentions while he felt like a hatchling trying to pretend it was a hunter stalking its mothers tail because he knew he could not make himself unmoving like stone in the same way and the other was too good at reading things without being read.

Hiccup finally moved one way, but it was a feint, and he quickly tried to strike the other direction, both of them tumbling over the ground again, over, and over, and over so that the world spun and every move he tried to make E-e-kTT reciprocated and adapted to it but Hiccup still came out on top and pinned the _pfikingr_ _into the stone with his claws positioned precariously to finish the _pfikingr_ by the neck if he had to but at some point in their tumble E-e-kTT had pulled his long sharp-claw and had it placed just as close to the vulnerable spot of Hiccup's own throat so that both had each other in a tricky tied position.

All it would take for either one of them to claim victory was to twitch just a little faster than the other, but as soon as Hiccup moved even the most miniscule degree, so did E-e-kTT, but no further than Hiccup did. The dragon-man drew a single bead of red from the surface-flesh, and so did E-e-kTT, and they sat like that for a moment staring at each other as Hiccup tried to figure out what to do and thought maybe the young _Chfff_ was trying to figure out what to do too but he couldn't tell past those barricaded blue eyes.

Where Toothless-love where you take bad liar trapping pfikingr where tell now!

E-e-kTT finally spoke to him now rather than at the others and Hiccup could make out 'Toothless' but nothing else and found himself infuriated now more than ever that he could not understand the _pfikingr_ and the _pfikingr_ could not speak right so that he could understand them properly. The man continued to say something and Hiccup also caught 'dragon' in there somewhere as the man turned his eyes toward the top of his head to look somewhere else and Hiccup hesitated a moment before slowly following his eyes into the trees.

His attention was only diverted for half a second, but it was enough for E-e-kTT to move and throw him off and Hiccup howled rage as he flipped from his back onto his feet again and bared his claws and teeth towards the human, but E-e-kTT had lost interest in fighting him, if he had ever had it at all, and instead looked at him expectantly and motioned towards the trees with his head and walked away and turned his back which was strange and crazy and _reckless_ but E-e-kTT had never really made much sense even by _pfikingr_ standards of nonsense.

With great wariness, Hiccup followed into the tree-line from a distance and spared a glance back but it was only him and E-e-kTT and the others did not look as though they would follow so he focused mainly on following and seeing where the _Chfff_ was trying to take him and hoping maybe it was to Toothless though for what reason or

why from the boat and not the cave they had started in he had no idea unless they had somehow moved everything to someplace else and somehow Hiccup had not wakened to notice.

E-e-kTT stopped just ahead of him and made a strange sound that wasn't _pfikingr_ or dragon but that Hiccup vaguely knew, three sort of croaking barks, and then was answered by something from far away just before Hiccup saw the black bird that sometimes followed and perched on and ate with E-e-kTT take flight from the shadow of a fir branch.

E-e-kTT followed it and Hiccup began to follow as well though every sense was trained and he could never remember being quite this anxious or uncertain because he had never gone hunting or prowling or _anywhere at all_ without _his_ Toothless there and it was strange and wrong and he did not like it at all and would rather fight many, many Queens or Alphas all at once so long as he could be with his Toothless-self than to be without him.

They came to a tall rock wall that Hiccup did not know and E-e-kTT said something in a mix of black-bird noises and _pfikingr_ and watched the bird fly up the rock and back and forth before landing somewhere.

E-e-kTT finally looked at him and Hiccup tensed warily with no idea what was to come but then the human jerked his head upward and flexed his hands over the black sharp-claws and started to use the hooked weapons to catch crags and ledges the same way Hiccup often used his dragon-gloves and claws and started to heave himself up the cliff.

Hiccup eyed it uncertainly and made a noise of question _follow there Toothless-mine follow maybe go there maybe yes? _but E-e-kTT did not answer him, probably for lack of understanding, and Hiccup growled _no listen frustration bad distrust liar bad pfikingr_, but he followed because he still held out hope that Toothless would be there and as they climbed further Hiccup could smell a mix of _pfikingr_ and dragon and his hopes rose so he climbed harder and faster and reached the mouth of a cave at about the same time as E-e-kTT did where the bird waited for them.

Hiccup was uncertain about going forward into the darkness or where the human was leading him but the second he started to make a noise to call for Toothless the _pfikingr_ smacked him in the side with the not-sharp side of the sharp-claw and made Hiccup jump with a snarl as the man gave him a look he thought he could read as _be quiet!_

Hiccup was more confused than ever when the _pfikingr_ prowled forward quietly in a way that he immediately recognized as hunting but he had been told that they did not hunt dragons and did not know what else it could be but he followed along quietly through the darkness which was hard to see in but his eyes soon adjusted just enough to follow E-e-kTT through the darkness.

Why hunt why promised no dragon hunting why confused worried lied? E-e-kTT only hissed near-silent at him and Hiccup stopped trying to find out why or what they were hunting and figured he would find out soon and if it was dragons then he could probably warn them or kill the _pfikingr_ if necessary but for now he would listen and

watch.

He could still smell the scent of human and dragon mixed together but it was stronger now than before and while it was the smell of dragons it was not the smell of ones he knew and there was a sense of hurt and blood in it that made the fur on his head prickle uneasily and he hoped not to find Toothless there at the same time desperately wishing his needed other half were here with him because he did not like to feel unknowing and vulnerable and alone and certainly not with a _pfikingr_ that was dangerous and clever and quick enough to best him alone but with Toothless he was unstoppable and he wished so very very much to have his other self here now so much that it physically hurt.

E-e-kTT paused and straightened up as the cave bent to the side and there was the faintest flicker of light to see by. The man peered his head around the corner and motioned for Hiccup to stay back with his weapon before creeping around the corner in a low slink. Curious and worried of what the _pfikingr_ might be hunting, Hiccup only went far enough to see around the corner to where there was a _pfikingr_ standing somewhat further down that did not seem to notice them and only now did Hiccup realize that E-e-kTT was hunting that _pfikingr_. And that only made him more confused.

He watched in fascination as E-e-kTT prowled and ducked through the darkness and behind crags silently and skillfully, more stealthily practiced than he had ever seen a _pfikingr_ be. Much of the time _pfikingr_ were loud and clumsy and did not hide terribly well.

E-e-kTT came right up behind the other _pfikingr_ easily without detection, so close that one step back would have them trip over him, and ended them with only a muffled noise and a quick slash of his sharp-claw at their throat. It was strange and astonishing and perhaps a little horrifying watching a human kill another in that way. He knew that sometimes _pfikingr_ fought and killed each other as well as dragons and wild animals but he had never seen them do so like this. So efficiently and quietly.

E-e-kTT lingered over them for a moment and made sure they were truly dead before motioning for Hiccup to follow him further down the cave. When he did, he glanced over the body in passing and confirmed for himself that it had only taken one clean strike to the vulnerable spot on his neck and he knew that if E-e-kTT had really wanted to he probably could have done the same to Hiccup many times over by now but for some reason he did not see Hiccup or the dragons as enemies like most _pfikingr_ and he was not sure at this point what about him was stranger.

The smell and now sounds of _pfikingr_ activity and dragons and heat and soot and blood was stronger and E-e-kTT crouched onto his belly once they reached the ledge and Hiccup followed him. This cave was larger. It was not much more wide, at the bottom, but it panned out wider at the top where they were and went deeper, with many overhanging ledges.

Below, _pfikingr_ milled about, but there were many more of them than there were in E-e-kTT's own stone-nest, and there were more things. Pits of heat with lumps of metal and sharp-claws and heavy-striking things, long wood eating-places, pens with animals that _pfikingr_

raised and sometimes dragons carried away to eat(not like the _preynoprey_ things but actual prey-things), traps, and large dragon-cages that had dragons in them.

When Hiccup squinted and leaned and tried to look closer though, he could see and smell faintly that these dragons were not kept nicely the way E-e-kTT kept trapped dragons. They were what Hiccup was most used to seeing with dragon-trappers in that their catches were tired and weak and not cleaned after and sick and had torn wings and missing limbs and bad wounds and they did not shy back only with confusion and fear that came out of strangeness and uncertainty but coiled and curled and splayed in a way that Hiccup intimately knew was because they were _suffering_.

Hiccup snarled under his breath and crouched on the ledge in a leaping-ready kind of way and wanted to descend down and do something but he still knew he did not have Toothless with him and that it would be too reckless even for him to do such without his partner with him.

He was aware of E-e-kTT watching him and he could almost hear Toothless in his head reprimanding _no reckless crazy no dangerous silly you always alert bad stay no_ even if the dragon was not there to scold him from doing it.

E-e-kTT shifted next to him and pulled out paper and something to draw with, craning his head out and his eyes flicking from one area to another in calculation before he began to draw and look and draw again. Hiccup recognized it as the cave from one angle and when the other was done he flipped that paper to the bottom and drew it again but in a different way, very roughly and quickly.

When he had filled another page he tucked them away into hiding again and crawled backward and onto his feet, turning to leave the same way they had come in. He did not say or motion but Hiccup still knew he was to follow though their purpose for coming was a mystery to the dragon-man. Why come here to see trapped and hurt dragons of other _pfikingr_ and then make drawings and simply leave again?

Once again, it made little sense to him.

As they left, the _pfikingr_ picked the dead one onto his back and carried them out, rather than leaving them behind. It was another thing that didn't make sense to him, at first. When they came into open air, he carelessly tossed the body down, which clattered across the rocks to the bottom, and then swiveled around and descended himself carefully.

Hiccup hesitated and looked between the cave and E-e-kTT, not sure whether to follow or stay, or if he was meant to do something, or if Toothless might be amongst those dragons somewhere even though he had not seen him. But why else were he and the dragon separated?

He didn't think he would get a proper answer, but he was anxiety-ridden and angry and desperate to know so he tried again despite that he was sure it was useless to do so.

Where Toothless where alive safe yes please Toothless need where?

To his disbelief, he got an answer. It was somewhat of a mix of dragon and _pfikingr_ speech, but he understood it perfectly.

"Going to Toothless", he answered with a motion of his head to follow, since his hands and sharp-claws were occupied with finding purchase on the stone. The confirmation that his dragon was alive was enough to excite Hiccup into following quickly. He hoped that it meant his other was also unharmed, but he would find out once they found him.

But he was still _alive_ and they were _going to him_ and for the moment that was enough to spur him on.

11. Chapter 11

****Learning from the Masters**
>A How To Train Your Dragon Fanfiction**
>Based of Le'Letha's "Nightfall"****

* * *

><p>After descending the cliff, Alekt covered their tracks and made sure to take the corpse out into the woods and brought the local crows swarming in with attention calls so that they would make short work of it, and bring any other carnivorous scavengers looking for an easy meal, too. By the time anyone was aware of it, it would be impossible to discern if the killer had been man or beast.<p>

Unnamed things happened all the time to careless vagrants, after all. What was to say some Changewing or stealthy mountain lion hadn't been hunting and dragged them off quietly?

Getting _(click)-uhp_ to follow him down the cliff and to the shore was the easy part. Convincing him to get back on the knar without force was less so. Even telling him that they were returning to where _Tt-th-ss_ was almost wasn't enough. Almost. But when Alekt played strategy, he played it well, and he had all of this worked out ahead of time.

He'd predicted that _(click)-uhp_ would be furious with him to find himself alone and without his dragon, but he knew he could handle it, and had told the men not to rush to his defense, since a cornered animal was a more irrational one.

The feral wouldn't kill him without knowing where to find his dragon unless he thought the Fury was dead, or he had been banking on as much anyway. He might have miscalculated that, but in the end, he had still come out of it and managed to do what he intended.

The next part of his plan should seal the deal. _(click)-uhp_ saw the dragons and the trappers and found an enemy he obviously despised and distrusted more than he did Alekt and his lot. As the saying went, _the enemy of my enemy_. He didn't know that he'd go so far as for them to call each other _friends_ any time soon, but perhaps they would be on neutral ground, at least.

The men went about working and Alekt made sure all of them were too

busy to pay `_(click)-uhp_` much mind, so the dragon-man was slightly less nervous, though he didn't seem to like being on a ship enough to relax. That didn't mean he wasn't curious about the workings of the ship and watching the men go about their business as much out of interest to learn as out of caution.

Alekt saw him watching the men tie knots and loosen ropes, adjust the sails or turn the rudder to adjust course as the wind tried to set them a different path. Sometimes he would look over the edge of the railing or the back at the waves and the paths of white foam that trailed behind. He held a certain fascination towards all of it, like a child. Not one who had never seen such things, but had never seen them truly in action to where he could see how it was done right.

Occasionally `_(click)-uhp_` would get a little closer to things that interested him, to the men, but never within arms or weapons' reach, and Alekt tailed close in case he would need to intervene if something happened or a conflict of any kind arose. Though `_(click)-uhp_` was good at keeping a healthy enough distance to avoid such things, and retreat if he started to feel boxed in anywhere.

Either because he had grown bored or simply overwhelmed by the uncensored proximity to so many Vikings, he retreated to a part of the ship where the activity was less. Likely he needed space. He was still like a wild animal, and Alekt didn't doubt `_(click)-uhp_` probably believed as much about himself with every fiber of his being. Other than the occasional, clumsy word of broken Nordic, he didn't really show any acknowledgement of being human. Either he couldn't fathom the idea, or he didn't want to. Either way, Alekt wouldn't force him to. He didn't care one way or the other, he only needed help to accomplish his goals. Whatever `_(click)-uhp_'s` personal beliefs were was irrelevant.

Alekt stood by and watched as well. While he could do a moderate job, sailing was not one of his or his clan's strengths. They lived much further inland than most Norsemen, so it wasn't necessary, even less so with their truce with other allied clans at the moment.

That didn't mean he didn't know how to navigate to a respectable degree, paying acute attention to their course and the shift of the wind.

"Adjust thirty degrees East," he called, the men immediately hopping to do so.

`_(click)-uhp_` watched them go about their tasks with wary curiosity, balancing on the balls of his feet in a crouch rather than standing to full height, and turned green eyes towards Alekt, questioning "`_Tt-th-ss?`"

Alekt only nodded and pointed in the direction they were headed and the island far ahead in the distance, barely visible.

"Yes, we're going to `_Tt-th-ss_`. There. See?"

"Isss."

Only after a few more minutes had passed, something else caught

Alekt's eye, and the eye of his crew members, and
(click)-uhp.

"Dragon!" one man shouted. Alekt saw it, and what he saw was that it was a rather _large_ dragon. Larger than a Nightmare, and bulkier.

"It's a Stormcutter," Alekt warned as he continued to watch it. Somewhere off to his side, _(click)-uhp_ barked excitedly, an odd sound like _"(click)-shhh-prrr!"_ and roared an eager greeting, answered in turn by the beast, but it didn't sound happy nor friendly.

Darting overhead, it circled around, turning with great precision, and came to land on the bow of the knar as the men parted away from it fearfully, making the ship tilt halfway towards sinking nose-down, effectively halting their progress and leaving them a sitting duck on the open waters.

The dragon snarled at them angrily and flared, many men drawing their weapons at the same moment they half-cowered and half-stood their ground, trying to gather up the courage to lunge at the enraged beast.

(click)-uhp chattered with a mix of elation and distress, the beast snarling and roaring back at him with large eyes darting between the men who had not fully decided yet whether they were going to jump ship or fight it off, some taking a few experimental jabs towards it. It didn't help matters, the dragon spreading its wings threateningly and drawing itself up, roaring more furiously and ready to set their entire ship alight.

"Stop!" Alekt ordered sharply, stepping forward and pushing the men aside. _(click)-uhp_ was close behind him, more eager to reach the dragon than he was afraid to get close at the moment, though his claw-gloved hand twitched many times readily in case he would need to use them. "Stand down! All of you!" At first they didn't listen, not willing to back down from a dragon that had landed straight on top of their boat and was hissing and snarling angrily at them. "I said: _Stand. Down!_" Alekt ordered again, this time with even more force. The men obeyed, but no one relaxed.

At the same time that he was ordering the men not to engage in a fight, _(click)-uhp_ pushed past him and chattered to the dragon. It didn't relax either, but when swords, axes, and hammers lowered, it turned its attention to the dragon man and responded.

There were still a lot of growls and snarls and huffs, but they seemed more the kind of doting and alarmed scolding than true aggression even as the dragon towered menacingly over the smaller man, who was dwarfed by comparison of the beast, much more so than he had been by the Night Fury. _(click)-uhp_ was obviously not the dominant between them and was placatingly submissive.

There was so much overlapping vocalization to vastly varying degrees and different motions and signals that Alekt could not keep track of it all. So much communication. Alekt had mostly only _heard_ _(click)-uhp_ and _Tt-th-ss_ communicate but he had not _seen_ it to this level because they had kept the two separate from each other and all other dragons.

He could make sense of some of it, but there was a lot to try to recognize and process, and while his experience with crows and other animals had helped, it wasn't enough to bridge the gap. They were still quite different. Not completely, but enough.

He moved closer now that it seemed hostilities had subsided, but he was not forgotten. The stormcutter snarled at him and he froze. It wasn't a mindless vocalization and the dragon could not have communicated it any clearer if it had spoken pure Norse.

One more step and you've crossed the boundary.

So much meaning behind only one sound. This dragon was much akin to the Fury in its intelligence. It might have been even more so, either by raw intellect or merely age and experience.

Honing in on him, the Stormcutter growled low in warning and stepped forward, Alekt matching it with a step back. The dragon watched him in calculating appraisal and moved another bit forward, and Alekt matched him again. The way that the beast eyed him, he wasn't sure if he truly had avoided a fight.

(click)-uhp could have told the dragon anything, really. Even perhaps that they had done horrible things to him and the Fury and was turning the larger dragon loose on them. Alekt had thought through his plans carefully, but he knew that there was always that one wildcard that couldn't be factored in until it came into play. This was that wildcard, and Alekt would have to adjust accordingly and carefully.

The dragon advanced again, and he retreated, not out of fear, but only to maintain distance as he ran through what to do in his mind, his movements slow and non-abrupt but deliberate.

He grasped his blades and slowly unsheathed them just as he knew he'd be backed to the mast, the dragon growling both in challenge and wariness as it lowered its head and thinly parted its jaws at him.

He could feel the Stormcutter's growl through the wood floorboards of the top deck. The dragon was healthily cautious of him and his weapons, mindful, but not afraid. Not in the least. No short amount of either skill on his part or mercy on its part was the only thing that would make or break whether or not he ended up in as a pile of smoldering ashes within the next few moments.

Its large eyes bore into him accusingly, but it didn't immediately attack. It was waiting to see what he would do, testing him. At least that was the sense that he got from it.

Lifting his blades to either side of him, he noticed the beast tense, snarling low sounds of uncertainty and warning, and then he dropped them, hearing them clatter on the wood but not taking his eyes off it. He wasn't afraid of the creature either, challenging it with his stare, unflinching, but all the same, acknowledging that he knew full well its superior strength. He was to hold his ground, not fight it.

The creature chattered at him, noises that had gone from hostile to

wary, but there was a certain returned acknowledgement there too, rigidness leaving its form somewhat as the message passed between them both silently.

I'm not your enemy.

Backing off, the dragon sounded something that might have been approval, seeming to have decided Alekt wasn't a threat. It was not so trusting as to turn its back, but it did refocus its attention back on _(click)-uhp_, snarling low and reprimanding. The interruption that Alekt had provided had not made it forget that it had been scolding the dragon-man before that.

The blue-eyed brunette retrieved his blades and strapped them back to his side, his men still gawking dumbly at everything that had just happened. At the very least, none of them had seemed dumb enough to go charging in during that judgment call period, when the Stormcutter had been assessing his worth.

"We're going back to your Night Fury," Alekt announced, catching _(click)-uhp_'s attention as well as the older dragon's. "To _Tt-th-ss_." He nodded to the men over his shoulder. "All of you, prepare to sail again." When no one immediately moved, he ordered crisply, "_Now_."

Once they scattered to rig the ship, he turned his attention back to the Stormcutter and _(click)-uhp_, motioning with a swift curl of his fingers. They didn't seem to understand, so he motioned with his entire hand this time, voicing, "Up. Off my ship."

The Stormcutter tilted its head at him, then at the boat, of which the nose was still tilted precariously close to having water spill over and fill the deck under the beast's weight. The dragon made a sound that might have been indignant realization, and _(click)-uhp_ clambered onto its shoulders just before it took flight, flapping above the ship.

Alekt nodded his approval and turned back to the men.

"We're sailing back to the cave," he announced. The men seemed nervous, eyeing the dragon flying above, but didn't argue. As they went about their work, setting course for the island they were temporarily calling home, Alekt slipped beneath deck.

Sangrida greeted him from a pen, and Alekt went about checking her tack, making sure it was still adequately secure, and then leading her onto the top deck once they drew close. The ship was already into the shallows by this point, and the Stormcutter and _(click)-uhp_ were waiting just on the shore at a deliberate distance.

The larger dragon seemed somewhat startled and shifted warily as Alekt leapt atop the mare's back and jumped her off the side of the boat, splashing onto land the last several yards. He pulled her to a stop, the horse dancing a few steps to the side. Both the dragon and feral chattered to each other, Alekt not having a hard time guessing what they were discussing.

"Have that ship secured but ready to sail again. This won't be the last use we see of it today," he ordered, then turned and commanded Sangrida into a gallop, blazing past the dragon and dragon-man into

the trees and indicating for them to follow and match pace, through the forest and marshland, and the long ravine beyond that.

The Stormcutter's shadow cast over him most of the way, and he could hear its wings, so he didn't bother to look back and make sure they were following.

As they came closer to their camp, he heard distinctive wails and howls that he recognized as those of the Fury. It was answered in similar distress by (click)-uhp and in uncertain anger by the Stormcutter, which overtook Alekt and swooped through the entrance just a third of a minute ahead of him.

Startled cries of Vikings met his ears and roars of the Stormcutter as it circled around the top of the cave above them, hovering for a moment and not daring to land as the men brandished weapons at the beast.

"Stand down!" Alekt ordered sharply, adding to their surprise. The men faltered, but when the Stormcutter landed, they snarled battle cries of alarm and habit, the dragon snarling warning and flaring itself up to full, intimidating height.

Alekt road between them, Sangrida kicking the air and bellowing, both sides backing off slightly.

"I gave you an order, now you follow it, unless you're really so eager to be ripped limbs from body."

Terrified silence overtook the group, but of course, there was always that one who wouldn't let the issue rest. It hadn't taken any effort on Alekt's part beforehand to guess who that person would be.

"Stand down?" Embrik hissed. "Alekt, do you know what's behind you? A dragon, totally free to kill us on the spot if it chooses, no chains or cages to stop it at all!"

"Yes, it's a dragon," Alekt deadpanned. "One that's already chosen of its own desire not to kill me," he added as he slid down from the saddle, and motioning behind him with a sweep of his hand. "But if you are dying to know that badly what the inside of ones stomach looks like, then by all means, ignore my orders."

He could see the fury flash across Embrik's eyes, but there was also fear and alienation, and not only for the dragon crouched behind Alekt. Since it seemed no one was daring enough to challenge either him or the Stormcutter any further, he turned his attention away from them.

The cries of the Fury had not ceased. If anything, they had grown in volume, frequency, and desperation, and now had everyone's acute attention.

(click)-uhp was shrieking and crooning back in response so that it was entirely impossible to tell them apart in voice, and Alekt was well aware of the Stormcutter's eyes burning into his back as he went to the cage, holding a hand up to stop them from rushing toward it yet.

He unlocked the door and stepped inside, where the Fury was busy pacing and pulling at the chain and keening and wriggling. He'd had the muzzle returned before leaving with `_(click)-uhp_` because he was absolutely certain the Fury would not simply leave without blasting open his confines to chase them and his dragon-boy otherwise, and the dragon gave him a heated glare as he entered.

Alekt held up his hands in a show of peace, a few noises of peace, and reached out for the muzzle, taking it off and tossing it aside. `_Tt-th-ss_` shook his head in relief and immediately gaped his jaws to cry out to `_(click)-uhp_` plaintively. Alekt circled around its side, and the beast swiveled to follow him, never trusting to let the man out of his sight. Alekt grasped the chain and indicated for the black dragon to come towards him more, and it did, though with reluctant distrust.

Then he did something that he had not yet dared to do and would most likely make all of his men think him completely nuts. He removed the chain from `_Tt-th-ss_`' neck entirely, nothing keeping him contained any longer.

Most would have seen it as the perfectly presented opportunity for the dragon to turn the tables, to attack and kill him, since the Fury was between him and the door now. Alekt knew better than to be afraid, because the dragon really didn't give a single rat dropping for him at this point.

It whirled around so quickly that Alekt had to duck to avoid its tail as it tore out of the cage straight for `_(click)-uhp_` and bowled him over. If it hurt at all " and Alekt had a strong suspicion that it did " the feral man didn't seem to notice, too enthralled with properly greeting and reuniting with the Fury as they rolled over each other, butted heads, nuzzled affectionately, crooned and sang, rolled over some more, parted to dance and chase in a circle and laughed, before tackling again, rolling over each other once more, licked, batted arms and paws, knock each other over with playful shoves(or at least try to in `_(click)-uhp_'s` case), roll again, messily writhe around each other, submissively croon and placate the Stormcutter as it towered over and scolded them with shrieks and growls again, and then promptly went back to writhing and rolling and latched around each other with an overly needy possessiveness.

It seemed as if they'd entirely forgotten everything else at the moment, or the possibility of Alekt and his group being enemies, too caught up in becoming reacquainted with each other to even think of or care about anything else around them.

It was an odd but touching sight. Both dragon and dragon-man obviously loved each other. This went beyond a simple master-and-pet relation. This was something deeper and familial, like twins cut from the same cloth and inseparable despite the clear distinction of different species. Alekt didn't think that `_(click)-uhp_` and maybe not `_Tt-th-ss_` either thought each other all that different though, as anything less than two dragons that found a need in each other. If they noticed, they didn't care. More likely was that they probably just didn't care to notice. Their being together seemed almost euphoric, and Alekt wasn't sure if it was only always like that or if the separation had truly been `_that_` horrible to them both.

The man had no doubts that, if something tragic truly ever happened

to one of them, especially if one died, the other would never recover. Perhaps even wither away and die themselves from the sheer loss. Just observing them from a distance, he could almost feel the unbridled connection they shared, more intense in just the one instance than any other relations he had seen.

Alekt stepped out and shut the cage, and was soon joined by Hartvig, who had taken the long way around the dragons to give them a fair distance.

"That Fury never once shut up for more than ten seconds since you left. He was rattling the entire cave with death throes without pause for hours. I was worried the other men would mutiny and kill the damn thing just to get it to shut up," he informed, laughing faintly, though there was an edge of seriousness to his voice all the same.

"Is that so?" Alekt hummed.

His eyes wandered to the men at this point, who were watching with both terror and amazement at the display the feral and Fury were putting on, seeming more like tumbling puppies than a terrifying Child of Lightning and Death and its equally wild rider.

The two finally became aware of their other surroundings again and looked to Alekt, with noises and expressions of mixed feelings; thanks, confusion, uncertainty, and undecided trust/distrust. They still clearly didn't know what to make of Alekt, but they at least didn't appear to think him an enemy, since he had had plenty of opportunity to have hurt or killed them while they had been trapped under his mercy, or what they had probably been sure would be a lack-thereof.

"Well, if you've all been well reacquaintedâ€¦" Alekt hummed, stepping closer. All the while, he was being watched, not only by the dragons. He stopped just short, closely watching the dragons and dragon-man to judge how close was still safe. "We have something that needs doing. The dragons, in the other Viking's traps, the bad ones. We help the dragons, and you help us, yes?" He took out and unfolded the paper where he'd sketched out a map of the place from above, holding it up to see for emphasis.

He wasn't sure they understood, but _(click)-uhp_ started to chatter dragonic urgently, and he could only hope that he was explaining for the two dragons to understand. After some minutes had passed with the three talking and deliberating, _(click)-uhp_ looked back at Alekt, sitting up and crossing his arms, tilting his head up. There was calculation in his eyes, his lips silently twitching as if he was trying to figure out how to say something, but it took him a few moments to form the word.

"Drakkkn kkko Ffreee." He stumbled slightly over the last word, but Alekt understood it, especially once the man indicated to the cages.

Alekt nodded.

"Yes, the dragons will go free, but not until _after_."

(click)-uhp growled disapproval at him.

"Drakkkn kkko Ffrrrree!" The Fury added to his command with a roar of its own, backing up his rider.

"_(click)-uhp_ and _Tt-th-ss_ have to agree to help us, first. We help you free the _hurt_ dragons, from the bad Vikings," he said, with a note of domineering finality to his voice that caught them off guard, not backing down as he was sure they had been thinking he might, especially with _Tt-th-ss_ free to kill him if the Fury wanted and the larger Stormcutter behind them. "And you help us. No help, no freed dragons."

They dissolved into dragon sounds again, the Stormcutter included, before looking back at Alekt with wary reluctance. _(click)-uhp_ looked like he was struggling to find another word, before speaking again clumsily.

"H-e-e-pp pfikingr, drakkkn herrr kkko ffrree?"

"Yes," Alekt nodded.

(click)-uhp looked skeptical, and both he and _Tt-th-ss_ chattered to each other, trying to come to a decision, but he had given them no reason to doubt, so far. True, it had been purely for ulterior motive, but he could have done away with them if he'd truly decided he wanted to. They would have continued working, even without help. This, however, was the better choice. The path of least resistance, if only they could win favor.

It seemed as if they'd decided, _(click)-uhp_ and _Tt-th-ss_ both staring at him with a look like _this had better not be a trick_, mirroring each other perfectly.

"Isss h-e-e-p pfikingr."

Alekt nodded his own approval.

"Gather around me," he called, this directed at the other men, who had been quite content to stay well out of range up to this point, save for Hartvig, who was a little less worried than the rest. More confident that Alekt knew what he was doing. He set the papers down, flattening them out on the stone. "Bring me small stones and paint."

"Well, you heard 'im!" Hartvig barked when everyone looked lost. "Get to it!"

With the sudden activity, the dragons became a lot more nervous, and flew up to perch on the tops of the cages where they could see everything from a safe distance and out of the way. They shifted uneasily as the Vikings warily made a circle around Alekt, and likewise the men were skittishly looking up at the beasts above them, wanting to be anywhere else.

Alekt kept the dragons primarily at his back, not so worried, and made sure they could see his papers just as well as the men.

The collection of stones, which collectively made up the same number as the men, dragons, dragon man, and the number of enemies he'd counted(plus a few more, in case he missed anyone), were painted

different colors respectively.

He made sure to indicate to everyone, even to `_(click)-uhp_` and the two dragons there. He had already figured ahead of time that explaining with words would get him nowhere, so he was hoping the visual aid would get the message across.

He explained that red were the `_BAD pfikingr_`, the blue the `_good_` ones(them), yellow for the trapped dragons, green for the Stormcutter that the dragon-man said was `_(click)-shhh-prrr_`, and black for `_(click)-uhp_` and the Fury, positioning them across the paper.

"Alright, so this is what we're going to doâ€|"

12. Chapter 12

****A/N: ****Sorry for the long delay! If you haven't heard yet, I've had some stuff happen back in November. My computer got hit with a Cryptowall ransomware and it ate everything on my computer. My art, writing, et cetera. I lost part of a second book in a series I was working on and don't think I'll be getting it back(luckily my book 1 manuscript is safe though, thank GOD). I've been trying to figure out a possible way to recover some of what I lost and been distracted writing other stuff because my motivation for LftM kind of died for a while with that...

Plus, since this is a Hiccup/Toothless chapter I had to get back into the swing of "Dragon-logic" and that's always a bit of a hard switch but even more now since its been a while since I read Nightfall or wrote anything for this and got out of practice.

BUT I'm back with another chapter! And I'll still try and get this done soon-ish. This is also officially THE longest chapter I've done for this story so I hope that makes up for it! Even more surprising is how long it got while being Hiccup/Toothless POV. Normally those are way shorter for me :P

`_`*Sidenote:`_` If I ever put "Toothless" instead of `_Tt-th-ss_` or "Hiccup" instead of `_(click)-uhp_` in Alekt's or any other non-dragon's POV, it's because my sub-conscious is a dirty sneak and I didn't catch it(as some of you have been so nice to point out so I could fix it a couple times before!). Consider it a typo in those cases!

* * *

><p>Learning from the Masters
A How To Train Your Dragon Fanfiction
Based off Le'letha's "Nightfall"

* * *

><p>It was so good just to be free and `_together_`!

This was their element. This was where they `_belonged_`. Not in dank, cramped cages. Not in nasty, rattling binding-things. Not amongst `_pfikingr_` stink in dark caves away from the sky and the sea and the wind that lifted them `_up, up, UP!_` and pleasantly whipped their

faces and their sides and tugged on the patch of fur on Hiccup's head and made the webbing of Toothless_love_'s wings gently rattle from the air that flowed by and around them very, very fast and made them both smile toothy, dragon grins because nowhere was better than just _flying free you me we us!_

They swooped to the one side and then the other, feeling the wind, and dipped, diving and letting the wind fill their faces and their breath, and go _down down down _until they could almost taste the sea and then caught the wind of their own descent to go back _up up up up higher faster up! _until it almost made them dizzy with _good yes free us flying flying together up! _that filled them both with just as much warmth as it did with the cold of wind whipping fast and hard around them.

Spiraling and drifting and falling and spinning and carried by the wind and after being worse than just stuck on the ground but _trapped _to not even walk freely, open freedom had never once felt and tasted so savory, like the first fat prey of spring after a long, scarce winter all bundled together with all of the craziness and need to _go go fly fast free crazy yes faster up higher up up faster! _and it is indeed crazy and tiring and hard and makes heads light and wings strain with the need to go ever harder and faster but neither worry or care because it is the _best _feeling in the world!

And they open their jaws to scream a sound of delight with no mind of keeping their voices to themselves even in this night because _bad pfikingr _are still far away and they are too happy-crazy with freedom and the wind is so fast and harsh in their speed that it almost chokes them but they fight it back and challenge it with their roars and delighted cries anyway because the wind is _their _domain and _their _mastery and it feels _good yes best amazing free flying you me we us together partner-mine not-alone yes together us flying!_

When the two-who-are-one have drank their fill of wind and flying and _down down down _then _up up up high fast! _they descend from the clouds quivering with a high of exhilaration and simply what it means to be _free _again to go where they please and when they please and no binding things or cages or _pfikingr _to keep them still and are breathing too hard yet not breathing enough because they were flying too fast and too happy-crazy and too _up-down-up-up _but it is worth it and they have not felt this _content _since first being caught by E-e-kTT and his _pfikingr_ flock.

Their flight now was steady and low and they spared attention only now that they had not been paying much heed to where E-e-kTT and his _pfikingr _were but with wings that carried them up and with Cloudjumper staying closer to the humans they were easy to find again even in the still dark of night.

Cloudjumper rolls his eyes at the free-high of his young charges and E-e-kTT only regards them with eyes still unmoving like stone itself. The _pfikingr_ working around the boat are silent in voice and careful with their movements to not make much noise but Hiccup can see them indicating and speaking with their bodies as they point and nod or shake their heads and direct the vessel along its slow but progressing path.

When they reach the place where E-e-kTT first showed Hiccup - it is

dark now, but he recognizes the mountain and has to resist flying ahead to the cave with the wounded dragons - they stop their boat in the shallows and move it ashore, just enough that the sea will not carry it away, as waves clawing the edge of land sometimes do.

Hiccup and Toothless busied themselves then with soaring high over the trees, blended against the sky and unseen to any on the ground, save for an owl perched at the topmost of a tree that dipped further beneath the canopy. An amber glow somewhere afar drew them and they circled safely out of the glow where they wouldn't be seen, finding a procession of _bad pfikingr_ marching alone with flaming sticks in-paw.

They did not immediately make a move and instead circled back, knowing that they were to wait for now and first get E-e-kTT's approval to charge in.

Of all the _pfikingr_ that they had met, E-e-kTT was one of the more understandable. They knew some concepts and words of the clumsy _pfikingr_ tongue but few enough that trying to communicate even the most basic quickly became frustrating, especially since most seemed either unwilling or too stupid to hear and speak dragon, and most of the things that worked for _pfikingr_ to speak to each other did not work for dragons because they were too abstract and unnecessary to the life of his kin to bother with.

E-e-kTT had done much _pfikingr_ speaking but he tried and did at least somewhat of an acceptable job of dragon-speaking - for a _pfikingr_, at least - and with the painted stones and above-drawings of the island and a great deal of time and repeating they knew what he wanted and the pack hunt he had planned and it was a _good_ plan as far as he could tell. Dragons hunted many things and sometimes they were big things or fast things one dragon alone could not handle or catch especially young dragons still learning so Hiccup and Toothless understood the concept of a pack hunt and planning and cooperation even if he and his Toothless-heart _had not actually participated in one in a long, long time. More seasons than there were toes on his front paws.

They more felt E-e-kTT's eyes on them than saw as they came to hover above the group, directing into the trees.

"_Pfikingr_!"

E-e-kTT nodded, speaking low and hollow towards his own kind as _Tt-(click)-th-uhp-ss_ dropped to the ground and prowled through the dark cover of trees ahead, showing where despite that it kept them more than a bit too close to the humans than they were strictly comfortable with but Hiccup filled his patience with thoughts of rescuing dragons and Toothless trusted his smaller half and their own _together-strength_ if trouble pounced upon them to stomp away such uneasiness for now.

The moving was slow-going and most of the _pfikingr_ were not good for such darkness and sneaking about but E-e-kTT kept them quiet and guided them effectively so that the two-who-are-one only had to show the younger _pfikingr_ Alpha the way until they found the enemy and their stick-fire glow that was far too easy to spot in the darkness.

E-e-kTT said something near-silent and motioned the other of his kind to stop and wait a safe distance before he followed the two night-camouflaged dragons to just outside the fire's glow, crouching in watch of their prey who were loud as arguing dragons themselves. When he deemed it time to truly begin hunting, E-e-kTT backed through the woods and motioned to the sky, signaling with a motion like a fast swoop with his paw and a quiet hiss like fire.

Hiccup and Toothless took flight without confirmation, but they understood what was being asked of them. They gained proper distance and height, keeping the glow of flames ever in their sight, before arching sharply in the air and dipping downward, tucking themselves inward instinctively and whistling through the sky with a speed only _they _were known for and letting out a pair of perfectly matched roars that only lent to the namesake _Fury_.

The _bad pfikingr _familiarily cried out in alarm before Toothless ever even fired a single blast, and the further shouts of fear as the ground exploded amidst the group made both he and his Toothless-half inwardly cheer dragon laughs as they flew fast and hard away in a wide arc to double over and swoop in a second time, this time unaccompanied by fire but flying close enough to almost rip the fire-sticks straight out of _pfikingr _paws with their tailwind alone. A third go and Hiccup whooped and keened amusement as the _pfikingr _threw themselves to the dirt to cower in terror, that they might be hit or plucked from the ground.

Toothless snorted and rolled his eyes _You silly crazy reckless silly wind-drunk yes you first-fly hatchling-silly! _ as they circled though there was still shared agreement in his partner's joy of flying again and scaring bad dragon-hurting _pfikingr _and they truly had not flown nearly enough or even been _together _nearly enough and the heart-fire of even just being close is the best thing and only stronger now after being apart and alone even if they were nearby for so long.

Hiccup only drummed the top of his head with an affectionate hum _silly crazy yes free again flying great you me we us together bad pfikingr fearing fun yes flying fear-making us fun yes!_ as the scared cries and chattering start to settle and Toothless fondly agrees as they turn and dive fast and terrifying and loud again and make _bad pfikingr _scatter and fall and run like many startled hare-prey going for their bolt holes.

When they circle around again, it is to abandoned fire-sticks on the path and only one left that runs up the hills towards the island's mountain and E-e-kTT's flock emerging from the woodland to keep fire from catching the trees and spreading, putting them out. E-e-kTT motioned to the mountain and led them back through the trees while Hiccup and Toothless-_heart of mine _soar above in search of the cave entrance closer to the top that Hiccup knows is there where he and E-e-kTT entered before.

It takes some looking, but the flying pair find it and perch at the top as they wait for E-e-kTT even though Hiccup is not patient and while Toothless is more so than his human/dragon-twin he is also anxious and wanting to help their dragon cousins from _pfikingr _claws and traps but they are _hunting _so both can stay still and wait until the proper time to pounce. E-e-kTT is the fastest to reach

them with a binding thing around a shoulder, the end of which he throws up to Cloudjumper to bite while the longest part he throws over the side of the rock for the rest of his _pfikingr _to climb as they are not nearly so good at the skill.

When all that are meant to climb are up, E-e-kTT pulls up the binding thing and leaves it coiled at the edge of the rock at the top, and the dragon-pair would be uncomfortably crowded if not for the fact that the _helping pfikingr _were still terrified of them enough to squeeze away against the farther wall and keep their distance. E-e-kTT motioned to his eyes with two front toes and motioned in a circle, and once again, the boy and dragon took to the air, circling around silent and careful.

_There bad pfikingr running there ground rock mouth trees _Toothless softly warned and Hiccup soon saw them as well down a path towards where they had first attacked so that they could turn and head back, landing on the ledge where E-e-kTT waited. Hiccup pointed out towards the sea to indicate, since motions seemed to work well on both sides where words failed. "Bad _pfikingr _kkko."

E-e-kTT merely nodded and turned into the cave, _Tt-(click)-uhp-ss _prowling behind until they reached where his _pfikingr _flock waited just above the cave. If there had been a replacement up at the top to watch this side, they did not see one. E-e-kTT stood at the very edge overlooking the cavern near a much larger human with long slashes down his face perhaps left by a dragon's talons once and the youngest, fire-haired _pfikingr _that Hiccup and Toothless had seen amongst them.

There were a few quiet words entirely lost on them before E-e-kTT reached up to scratch the head and between the shoulders of the black bird perched next to his neck and he fell into that vaguely dragon-like chatter. Both dragon-man and Fury craned to try and hear but it was not entirely understandable to them though closer to their own dialect so there may have been snippets they could understand like _fly _and _affection love _and _get for me _though there were things that were more human-speak as well that made it hard to distinguish beyond that.

Nevertheless, the bird took to the air and spiraled downward toward cages and bad _pfikingr_ to disappear in the dark like he and Toothless did in the night. E-e-kTT and the fire-hair murmured things to each other but it was beyond any words that either of the pair understood and this part beyond what they knew of the hunt. They knew only to wait until E-e-kTT signaled to go.

When the bird returned, it was with something in its beak, perching on Alekt's shoulder where he took it, and tossed it to the fire-haired younger _pfikingr_, speaking to him. When the fire-hair held it up, Hiccup could see that it was small and long, with square teeth at the very end. Hiccup had seen them before and knew they could open locks on things like traps or boxes sometimes but usually they only fit to a few things and each usually had their own unlocking thing different from another's. Much of the time it was simpler to find his own way to pick such things open than to find the right one.

E-e-kTT then turned his attention to the two-who-are-one, and motioned from them to the fox-hair. They recognized their own names

and _go _then another human-sounding word - _Eh-brr-k?_ - that they assumed to be the fire-hair's name. Hiccup hummed acknowledgment as E-e-kTT directed the other _pfikingr _to where they should be for the group-hunting and the dragon and rider went to where the fire-hair was, noting in satisfaction that the youngling was quite intimidated, much more as he should be unlike E-e-kTT.

They were wary as they should be of a human of course but confident and they had seen and heard and smelled how this youngling was scared by them even with a cage between them so they were not terribly worried what he would do though they still kept him in their sights just in case and he seemed to be doing the same though still with trying to put as much distance between them without leaving entirely which left the two to sit and hold their ground with even more confidence.

When the fire-hair youngling crept down the rocks, they crept too, sliding down from one ledge or outcrop to another with quiet ease and getting perhaps too much amusement out of Eh-brr-k's rabbitiness at having them follow him.

Below there were still enough _bad __pfikingr _to match E-e-kTT's band though they had no _noprey _things to ride and most of all they had no dragons on their side as friends, only captives. Soon enough, not even that.

When they reached a ledge just away from the cages and the firelight, Eh-brr-k stopped and crouched in the shadows, the dragon-pair doing the same. Some of the remaining _bad pfikingr _after the others left thinking their hunters outside stood and chattered their nonsense near the cages, relaxed and unaware to being stalked but fidgeting as if unknowingly sensing a predator somewhere.

They saw the dim glint of a sharp thing in Eh-brr-k's paws as he shuffled next to them apprehensively like a growing hatchling to its first hunt of something much bigger than the tiny prey things that mothers brought for their hatchlings to practice with, quivering faintly with nervous tension. His attention was trained so hard on the _bad pfikingr _that he nearly jumped into the sky when Toothless' tail end lightly brushed him, his Hiccup-half huffing silent laughter at the wide eyes of fright that turned towards them.

_You nervous edgy calm easy hunt bad pfikingr easy unaware calm you nervous hatchling calm _Hiccup hummed encouragement under his breath as he and Toothless wriggled themselves flat and still against the rock, comfortable and relaxed but ready to spring when they would be needed. He was only met with a mute, stupid stare that made him roll his eyes in frustration that the other couldn't even grasp such a simple concept. Even if he couldn't speak dragon at all Hiccup had at least hoped for a slightly better result.

He didn't voice such complaint but he could almost hear Toothless' silent agreement in the way the dragon shifted to glance up at him and give his own slight roll of the eyes and a dragon's smirk.

Settling, they waited until they saw E-e-kTT and his flock spring from the shadows, startling the _bad pfikingr _into scattering at first, then regrouping with sharp things drawn to defend their stone nest. There were shrill sounds of sharp things clashing and grinding,

human roars and chaos. The _pfikingr _that guarded the cages went rigid and whirled, running towards the fray without noticing them in hiding nearby.

That was when Eh-brr-k scrambled up and slid down the rocks and towards the cages, _Tt-(click)-th-up-ss _sliding down after him silently and using the cover of the shadows to remain unseen. No _pfikingr _noticed them and turned to attack, and there were no fires to reveal them easily. The dragons in the cages chattered alarm at the commotion, so they didn't have to try hard to conceal their noise.

Eh-brr-k fumbled with the small unlocking thing that E-e-kTT's bird had brought, the mechanism clicking open and door swinging open with a dull screech that was masked by the shearing of sharp-things and dragon howls of alarm. Eh-brr-k hesitated at the door and looked between the wounded dragon in the cage and _Tt-(click)-th-up-ss _in helpless uncertainty of how to proceed, then darted out of the way as the dragon partners pushed past and chattered to the injured cousins _open free now go no trapping leave out safe now come before pfikingr see go now you out _though still keeping some distance so as not to come off as a threat being that they were strangers even if these were other dragons.

The dragon in the cage watches them with scared-wide eyes and chirps and growls _scared noisy danger hurt fighting confused _and clearly doesn't trust them but Hiccup and Toothless continue to offer their reassurances and coaxing until the dragon starts to come forward and they move back to let it leave. Its moving awkwardly, and a good part of its wing is damaged, maybe too much to fly, and the long-lingered scent of blood and sickness is evident to them both.

The dragon is nervous, but they continue to lead it along with gentle warbles that are all but lost under the deafening noise of clashing sharp-things. When they reach a part of the cave that is separated from view and the fighting, near the cave entrance on the ground but not straight into it yet, they order the dragon _stop wait hide quiet no move here stay you yes _before going back to the other cages when they are sure it listened to them to find Eh-brr-k prying open another of the cages.

They do the same with another, while the youngest _pfikingr _goes to work on another cage. There's an aggravated screech and Hiccup turns to look back as they're ushering the second freed dragon along. The first two had been anxious and timid, hesitant to leave their confines, but the next immediately lunged outward and at Eh-brr-k ready to shred off his limbs.

Hiccup hops off of Toothless' back and saunters back, trying to draw her attention and convey that Eh-brr-k is there to _help free peace friend no harm _and not one of the _bad pfikingr_ but she isn't listening and sends spikes from her tail his way that he leaps aside and rolls away from. Toothless is there in a second and snarls in defense of his dragon-boy with wings and fangs splayed.

She turns to screech at them, but it is short-lived and she is uninterested in them and wholly committed to Eh-brr-k with snarls of _human bad dangerous human kill! _even as he's retreating and trying to dart to the sides to safety only to be cut off and cornered. Hiccup can see one paw tightening over a sharp-thing at Eh-brr-k's

side and he doesn't see dragon and Viking walking away without a bloody confrontation first and that's when Eh-brr-k surprises him.

He's making noises. They are clumsy noises. Noises that are not wholly human as Hiccup has heard them but neither quite dragon or animal, but he faintly recognizes the noises and he knows immediately where Eh-brr-k probably heard them before to use them. They are almost whimpers, more closer to pleas, and the more he goes on the more Hiccup can catch those same things that are almost like _peace friendly surrender don't hurt _in only the vaguest concept of meaning in the sounds but they are deliberate and loud enough to be heard over the nearby fighting.

If nothing else, it confuses the dragon that was ready to rip him apart and makes her step back and tilt her head to examine him and make sure she is attacking a _human _for sure and not a dragon hatchling and the hesitation is enough to switch her focus to the fighting _pfikingr _nearby instead and change priority from fighting to fleeing. She leaps on top of one of the cages and takes off past Hiccup and Toothless to escape, her wings still good for flying, and Eh-brr-k just stares, looking as dim-faced as a human's prey-thing.

Finally he lets out a long breath and combs front toes through the red fur on his head, chattering something low so that it is lost to Hiccup, though it is in his own human language and so he can't understand it anyway. Shaking himself off, he goes to the next cage to unlock it, and shifts nervously to the side somewhat as the Hiccup-Toothless linger behind him patiently.

It is then when they're freeing another dragon that Eh-brr-k barks something, and once again its meaning is lost to Hiccup's ears, but its sharp, like a warning, and he sees the flash of the sharp-thing at Eh-brr-k's side being hefted back. He and Toothless snarl and duck when it goes flying, and sticks in a _bad pfikingr _somewhere behind that crumple to the ground. Eh-brr-k leaps past them to retrieve his sharp-thing.

They are looking at him with some surprise and thankfulness when a human roar announces another _pfikingr_ bearing down on them. Toothless likewise barks a warning, Eh-brr-k whirls around and ducks aside the swing of another weapon, and Toothless blasts the attacker, sending him flying back and bowling into others in the fray.

Eh-brr-k stands and regards them, looking wide-eyed, but says yet more that they can't understand but they can hear something like _relief _and _surprise _and _praise _somewhere in the tone that they take as gratitude and purr accordingly in reply.

They continue to work to get the dragons out, and it becomes easier since the remaining ones had seen their fellow cousins go free and therefore need less coaxing to be drawn out and taken to the place in the shadows with the other dragons though it is tense and not all are friendly with the other presences even though they have been in cages beside each other for what has probably been a long time now.

The fighting is beginning to subside now, no more sounds of sharp-things bashing into others or into shields or rock or wood.

There is an echoing rumble and the scent of _noprey_ things from the entrance and wide, flat slabs of wood with rolling rounds on four of the corners as if whole chunks had been taken from the circular trunks of trees.

Eh-brr-k motioned for them to follow and get the wounded dragons along with them, some which took more coaxing or pushing to make move than others, but were likewise too weak or battered to refuse easily, even in their wariness of the _noprey_'s and the rolling wood things that they were made to climb onto and lay on.

Of those in the cave, there were no more _bad pfikingr_, E-e-kTT's flock having taken care of them, and were soon to rejoin near the entrance and go about busily attaching binding things to the ride-with's on the _noprey_'s and secure the dragons without hurting them or having them turn hostile against the humans.

It wasn't long before Toothless perked to listen, and the _noprey_'s shifted with a nervousness of sensing danger. The sound was soon to reach Hiccup's ears as well, the clatter of much running and jingle of sharp-things or flap of leather coverings. E-e-kTT noticed as well before any others besides _Tt-(click)-th-uhp-ss_ and came to stand near them with long, claw-curved sharp-things ready in either paw.

From the shadow of the cave throat appeared many more _bad pfikingr_, fresh to the fight and in equal enough numbers to E-e-kTT's own entire group, brandishing sharp-things and shields with anger on their faces.

The Alpha was easy enough to pick out from the group, a snarling man with a face of long black fur from his chin, two full paces ahead of all others, who hesitated and watched him to wait for him to make the first, leading move.

He howled furiously, all of it lost in nothing but pure gibberish to the two-who-are-one, but E-e-kTT stepped forward, not backing down from what may have been an outward challenge, and clearly understood as he spoke back. There were a few snippets that were vaguely understandable, _dragon_ and _no_ and _free_ with others words between that were lost on them.

Whatever was being said was clearly not an agreement or a stand-down as the _bad pfikingr_ Chfff _snarled and stepped forward with weapon drawn, ready for an all-out fight all over again as he brandished his sharp-thing towards E-e-kTT, before then directing towards Toothless with his weapon and a low growl.

Both Hiccup and Toothless-_soul-mine_ _snarled back, not at all intimidated.

E-e-kTT then said something else, and they recognized some mention of _Cloudjumper_ in there and E-e-kTT raised a paw to his mouth and made a shrill, ear-splitting whistle that made the two black-scaled dragons perk and yelp out _now now!_

They were answered by a deafening roar that filled every corner of the cave with a booming echo and Cloudjumper dropped from the shadow of the high ceiling where he had perched in wait. The _bad pfikingr_ _jumped in fright and scattered like rabbits, looking straight up at

the descending dragon whose maw threatened flame, and Hiccup and Toothless roared their own greater confidence at the _pfikingr_ as they joined him in the air, hovering over E-e-kTT's band.

They looked as though they might regroup, and E-e-kTT waved a paw over his head, sharply motioning to either side and making a noise that was like a blast of fire to either side of the narrower cave tunnel. They knew the signals and fired, taking either side to blast and further scatter the enemy Vikings to clear the way. E-e-kTT shouted something to his own flock and they urged the _noprey_ creatures forward, first in an abrupt lurch, and then gaining speed and movement forward.

The _bad pfikingr _ moved to get in their way, and E-e-kTT motioned for another blast to deter them as the first of the _noprey's _and _pfikingr _wood pulled-thing and wounded dragons disappeared through it, then another. Fighting exploded on the sidelines, between E-e-kTT's flock and the other _pfikingr_ as the wounded dragons were towed through, until the last ones were out.

E-e-kTT cut down one or two more enemy _pfikingr _before shouting and motioning for a retreat, motioning for Cloudjumper to go back out above and for the rest to follow him through the lower tunnel, which was only occasionally lit by fires on the side walls.

Hiccup and Toothless were less at ease with the narrow confines of the tunnel, though most of it went only one direction without turning much, and it was wide enough for them to fit and have some room to spare on either side, enough to turn and blast a pursuing Viking here or slash and beat another one aside there.

They easily overtook the stragglers, and then E-e-kTT when he stopped where the cave opened into forest again. There was a strangled noise behind them, and then something in the _pfikingr_ tongue that they _did _recognize.

"Stop!" For a moment, they were uncertain who had said it, before they turned to see E-e-kTT, a sense of urgency in his voice that was so abnormal and foreign as to be startling. "Stop!" There were more words, but they were lost on them. What wasn't was the male turning and darting back into the cave, sharp-things drawn. Amongst the words they didn't know, they caught one that was more recently familiar to them though.

Eh-brr-k.

13. Chapter 13

**A/N: **Been way too long since I've updated but I got stuck on the beginning scene with the clash in the tunnels and re-wrote it in like 20 different ways before I finally settled on this version. Hopefully it won't happen again!

* * *

><p>Learning from the Masters
A How To Train Your Dragon
Fanfiction
>Based off Le'letha's "Nightfall"

* * *

><p>Everything he had predicted and orchestrated had been going well. The first surprise attack from (click)-uhp and _Tt-th-ss_ on the patrol party had done its work to let them get close and ambush the men, save for one to go running back and report to his fellows, effectively cutting their numbers inside the cavern itself to a manageable half when the trappers went out to provide back-up.

That gave them a nice bone to chew on for a while as he led his group and the dragon-allies to the cliff where they could climb up and sneak in from above, pairing Embrik and the Fury-pair for extracting the dragons, and his men for the surprise assault to supply distraction. It was no surprise to him that, once the horses and flatbed carts had been brought, and the wounded dragons loaded onto them to move more easily, that those outside finally returned to confront them.

The leader of their band was a stout man with an ugly snarl contained within his large, black beard, spitting at them as being _thieves_ and declaring that, after he killed all of them, he'd be taking all of the dragons back, with the rare Fury as an extra prize, though _(click)-uhp_'s presence gave the enemy leader a few moments of perplexed pause. On his signal, _(click)-shhh-prrr_ dropped down from where he had perched at the very top of the cave, frightening the trappers into scattering away from the mouth of the entrance tunnel so that they could send the horses and carts rushing through, while Alekt and his crew held them back with weapons drawn and dragons firing when he bade it.

Once the carts were through, he ordered his retreat, and they were almost home free, but there was always that one hitch in a good plan. He had been expecting and waiting for it all along, knowing that their good luck couldn't possibly last the entirety of their mission, no matter how well he had accounted for all of the foreseeable factors.

That hitch finally showed itself via a thrown axe in Embrik's backside, as he was one of the last stragglers out, and he crumpled to the dirt, not even out of the tunnel yet.

"Stop!" he ordered sharply, a number of his men not hearing him, so he ordered again, even as he whirled back to meet his enemies, "stop! Reverse your retreat, and prepare to lock blade and shield! Embrik has fallen! Not a man leaves without him!"

There was a brief moment of scattering and confusion, before the men behind him regrouped and turned back to the fray. He only caught the turnabout in his peripheral vision, but his attention was focused ahead.

The leader of the opposite band yanked the earlier thrown ax from Embrik's back and stepping onto and over the lad. He paid no mind to the pained cough of the redhead beneath his boot.

Alekt narrowed his eyes at the larger man, baring his blades on either side of him. The man grinned in return at the silent challenge, hefting his axe up to clash.

Their paces were quick but not an outright run until the last two

steps, as the larger man swung his axe over his head and down with a snarl of teeth. Alekt swept low and to the side. The directional change of the other man's swing was instantaneous, and Alekt felt the wind of it as the weapon barely cleared over his head, maybe taking some hairs with it, but he spared them no attention.

He shook his head faintly at the small shower of dirt from the tunnel wall behind him, but kept his eyes on his opponent and caught the man by the back of the leg with the point of one sickle, tearing a nice gash through flesh past the leather armor. There was a snarl behind clenched teeth, but it wasn't enough to drop the man, and Alekt didn't expect it to, but it would slow him, and that would make it easier to finish him off so long as he didn't get cocky.

The rest of the other man's group was hanging back, no doubt assuming that their leader would emerge victorious without help, especially given the difference in size. Size was as much to his advantage as it wasn't though, and he'd learned how to work with it.

He danced around the man's back toward the other side, and the man spun around the opposite way to catch him at the halfway point since he could only swivel effectively on the uninjured leg. Alekt realized that quickly, and turned his movements into a feint, reversing his direction back towards where he'd started, managing to slice the other's side now.

The man whirled to face him on his uninjured leg and lunged, landing with the injured leg somewhat clumsily, but the guy pushed through the pain and kept up his charge, forcing Alekt to block with both of his blades. It left his stomach open for the larger Viking to kick him and send him staggering, but he thought it even better to let himself fall flat when he heard a distinct whistling sound and a ripple of alarm through both his group and the other one.

He let his back hit the dirt, and didn't miss his larger opponent throw himself to the side to avoid a bolt of violet flame, nor how the enemies crowded in the tunnel tried to scatter, some taking the hit and flying back into others. Alekt tilted his head back to glance the Fury pair at the entrance, the dragon's wings splayed and both snarling teeth in a unified crouch of menacing aggression.

Alekt knew better than to get back up when he saw the glow of another blast readying, and the satisfying noise of fearful, retreating jostling of the enemy band trying to move back.

"Where do ye' all think you're going?!" their leader roared, but even he instinctively ducked as Tt-th-ss fired, more to one side rather than down the center, making the wall explode into a miasma of dust, then another shot to the opposite side. It was when the dragon and feral man screeched at him, (click)-uhp making a sound that was somewhere close to saying go but still distinctly animalistic, that Alekt flipped onto his stomach and leapt to his feet.

The other band's leader went to jump back to his own feet and cut down the brunette, but the Fury and rider snarled an unmistakable threat that had him freeze where he was.

That gave Alekt a brief window to reach Embrik, who was still conscious, though only barely so as Alekt hefted him up and pulled one of the younger male's arms over his shoulder. He could hear the

redhead wheezing, and there was a touch of pinkish foam from his lips and wound on his back with each strained exhalation.

"Y-y'could've... just left me..." Embrik pointed out hoarsely.

"I could have," Alekt muttered in return, adjusting the other's arm and making haste towards the exit.

Alekt glanced the man, who was watching him pass as well as the Fury in calculation. A calculation Alekt was soon to realize he didn't like. Dragons had shot-limits. Everyone who had bothered to learn anything about them knew that, and if this man was a trapper, he was probably aware of it too. Judging from the look etching onto his features, he might even know exactly how many a Nightfury had.

Standing up, the main raised his axe and took a gamble, screaming viciously at the dragon and daring it to blast him. Tt-th-ss and (click)-uhp roared back his challenge, but the black dragon didn't fire another blast, and the trapper leader was quick enough to realize why.

"Regroup, lads! The beast is fresh out of shots!"

Alekt issued a sharp, alerting noise, vague but hopefully enough for the other two - whom he had established were both fairly quick of wit - to realize where this fight was headed and that the enemy knew they were out of fire. They seemed to catch the hint and spun around to bolt from the tunnel, with Alekt and Embrik just behind them.

The enemy Vikings were close behind. The leader of the trappers caught pace with Alekt just as the younger man reached the tunnel entrance, and swiveled to avoid the worst of an incoming blade, which still managed to shallowly slice through the top of his shoulder and collarbone.

Alekt heard Tt-th-ss and (click)-uhp keen something, and the larger Stormcutter dropped from above, whipping its tail around. Alekt threw himself and Embrik to the ground. The trapper tried to heft his weapon up to wound it, but (click)-shhh-prrr was quicker. The man was knocked back into the tunnel a few feet, before the Stormcutter blasted a stream of fire through the enclosed space. There were screams, then the audible sound of wood splitting, and the following crash of collapsing earth and stone. Alekt highly doubted they had to worry about the trappers anymore after that.

There was a round of cheering, but Alekt didn't share in it, and paid it less than no attention when Embrik coughed again. He lowered the kid down to sit and kept a steadying hand on his shoulder to keep Embrik from lying down. The sounds of celebration were quick to fade.

"Let me see the wound," Alekt advised.

Embrik gave him a wry smile, wheezing a sort of liquid, whistling sound. "...don't know... how much g-...good you can... do..." A cough interrupted his words, and stained his lips faintly red.

Alekt motioned for one of the other men to help by keeping a hand on

his shoulders to keep Embrik upright, while Alekt himself removed some of his top to look at the gash in his back, gingerly pulling either side of the wind apart to examine it. It was deep, and experience had taught him that the sound probably meant there was likely a hole in his lungs and they were filling with blood. The broken ribs could be mended with time, but the other part was beyond his abilities. It would be a hard thing even for the best healer in their villages back home to fix.

"I'm sorry," Alekt apologized quietly, "but I think you're right. There's little I can do."

Embrik laughed hoarsely, a truly awful, sputtering, choking sound. "G-getting killed after... s-skulking... in the sh-shadows-... and r-running a-away... the gods d-do not f-f-favor me..."

"You did a good thing today," Alekt told him sharply, "and helped us find victory. I'm sure the gods will not fault you, and we will give you a proper send off so that they know of it."

The redhead smirked. "Who knew? That you c-could be something... other than a c-cold f-f-fish?"

Alekt didn't humor the statement, glancing to the other men standing around with grim looks on their faces, even the Fury pair and Stormcutter chattering something that sounded sorrowful and worried and unsure.

"Get the horses moving. We return to the ship."

The men lingered for some moments, but soon enough turned to obey. Alekt slung Embrik onto his back, supporting his legs on either side. It was a little awkward, given that Embrik was slightly larger, but it wasn't too much for him to handle. He trudged at the back, the party moving at a carefully slow pace, and there was little if any conversation, making the occasional coughs and increasingly shallow breathes against his ear all the more pronounced.

"Cinaed... i-is going to be-... u-upset..."

Alekt kept his gaze forward, picking his way down the path with care not to jostle the other male on his back. "Cinaed is your younger brother, isn't he?"

Embrik nodded faintly. "I d-don't kn-know... if he'll e-even be o-old enough... t-to unders-stand."

Alekt knew he couldn't relate, and trying to pretend as if he did wouldn't help anything. He has an older half-brother of his own, but it's not the same. He and his half-brother are family. They've grown up together, and Alekt couldn't remember a time without him. This experiment of his is the longest he's been away from his half-brother, and surely either one would miss the other if something were to happen, but for them it's different. They think more than they feel, put logic above emotion. They understand that everything dies and it isn't something to mourn, that the rest of their world continues no matter whose life is lost. Nature at its core spares no special recognition towards any individuals as more or less important in the system at large. They fight for survival the same as anything else, but if death happens, it happens. It isn't worth grieving over.

All it does is waste energy and time better spent surviving.

He knows, too, that they are very much alone in this regard. Even their rival Norsemen, who are feared in many a land near and far, grieve and cry, and consider him and his Clan to be especially brutal for how they regard the world around them and the dead.

Even the most vicious of wild beasts - bears, wolves, wildcats, and dragons - take time to mourn their dead.

Not the KrÃ¥ke. To his people, it is a waste. It doesn't bring the dead back, so there is no point in it. The living need that time and energy more, even the small children know this.

So he can't relate to what it is to grieve, nor of feeling regret that someone else will grieve for him. But he can relate to understanding something, and he doesn't underestimate how much children can understand given the right kind of explanation, even if the explanation is simplified.

"He will understand, and I will be sure he understands that you didn't die for nothing."

"Go easy on him," Embrik replied hoarsely. "We c-can't all be l-like you, y'know..."

"I will," Alekt promised.

"Good," Embrik mused, breaths faltering. "B'cause... afterlife o-or not... I'll come after you... if y'don't..."

After that were a few halting gasps, and then nothing, chest falling silent and still against his back.

* * *

><p>It was only a matter of time by then. Everyone knew it, but no one would say it outright. The silent knowledge was still palpable in the slow, mournful steps of the men and the contagious, noiseless tension. The procession of the horses and rattling of wooden wheels had most likely made most of the nearby animals flee, and the rattling was painfully loud compared to the disquiet of the group.<p>

The confirmation came when they reached the ship and Hartvig turned to look at Alekt and Embrik properly, though he'd already had his suspicions when the sound of wheezing ceased.

"Is he...?"

"Yes," Alekt informed somberly. The tension fell then, only to be replaced by hung heads and lowered stares of mourning. "Have the injured dragons and the horses loaded. We return to our camp."

Hartvig gave a solemn nod, then turned back to the rest of the men, who seemed slightly at a loss of what to do in the face of their comrade's death. "You heard him. Everyone get to your tasks. Get the dragons and horses aboard, then ready the rigging to sail!"

The men went to do as ordered, but they didn't jump to it and there was no light-heartedness to any of their actions or demeanor. They didn't even spare much attention for the Night Fury and Stormcutter as they worked, not even to fear them at the moment, and they were only marginally more afraid of the wounded dragons that they had to get closer to.

They pulled out large, flat planks for the horses to climb and pull the carts up onto the top of the ship, then unlatched the horses and moved them below deck. It was a cramped fit above deck, but there was enough room to work. The ship sat lower in the water than it was supposed to, but didn't sink or have its sides fall below the waves.

The trip back was uneventful. The waves weren't too rough, the wind was fairly good, and the men in no mood to celebrate their victory just yet. The Fury and Stormcutter accompanied them from either side back to the island they were temporarily calling home, though he was sure it had more to do with the wounded dragons than any of they themselves.

Dawn was breaking when they reached the island and pulled their ship ashore, unloading the dragons and horses again to wait at the edge of the trees. The wounded dragons at least seemed complacent enough to rest on the flat of the carts, having no fight in them that would usually make them ornery and bordering on impossible to handle without chains and cages.

No one needed to be told what to do at that point. They silently and efficiently went about gathering branches of all sizes and fallen trees, whatever they could find, and stacking it into a rectangular stack on the shore, packing in dry brush and grass. It was a familiar scene to all Vikings, especially after a battle, but rarely was it any easier than the other times.

When the pyre was fully built up, Alekt stepped toward it carrying their redheaded youngest and laid him out on top of it.

The rest of the men stood in a half-circle around the pyre, facing towards the sea as it licked at the bank with a gentle growl. In the silence of the men, the click of flint and steel in Alekt's hands was easily heard until dry brush finally caught the sparks, and with a few breaths to give the embers greater life, fire started to spread over the wood structure until it was consumed entirely.

There were no words spoken for the departed, only grim observation, faces set in deep frowns and scowls, many a man looking like he'd aged many years in only minutes. Alekts was the only face that appeared entirely neutral, but he respectfully stood and watched the flames the same as anyone else, with the only movement being the ocean wind tugging at his clothes.

Hartvig glanced to the side and a little ways behind them, noting that even the Stormcutter watched with a respectful sort of silence. It was strange to think of a dragon observing their long-held traditions, much less with such a look of intelligence and knowing, some sort of distinct and distant familiarity. He was sure that anyone else who might have seen it would argue that it would make sense to the nature of dragons: dragons burn things, fire is no stranger to them. Maybe it was simply the musings of an old man, but

he felt like there was something more to it than that, some story that he would never hear.

The only observers to voice anything were the Fury and rider, quietly rumbling and trilling nothing that he could understand, until the Stormcutter gave them a low growl that silenced both of them. It gave the impression of many a human parent or older sibling hushing a small child that was being too fussy and causing interruption, rather than a threat. The black dragon and wild young man settled to watch next to the larger dragon, eyes focused ahead and curious but perhaps subtly sad, unless Hartvig's eyes were playing tricks on him.

Slowly, the group began to disperse as each probably finished their silent goodbyes, returning to their work to secure the ship and take the hitched horses and wounded dragons back to the cave they were calling home. Only Alekt and Hartvig remained until the fires ceased and left only ashes, the men taking the horses back to camp and the Fury pair and Stormcutter following them earlier on.

The brunette boy stayed to collect the remaining bone fragments and ashes of cremation into an urn, to return them home where they could be put in a proper resting place, and then turned and walked back without a word, Hartvig following and offering only companionable silence from a few steps behind.

Returning to their camp was less depressing. The horses were already unhitched, the injured dragons curled up near the cages - though still outside of them - and appeared to be resting. Hartvig could see the Stormcutter perched atop one of the cages, lazily overlooking the cave but not entirely unalert. It took a little longer for his aging eyes to make out the shape of the Fury and likewise black-dressed rider curled up on top of the adjacent cage, with the smaller feral human nestled between the Fury's paws and curled around its neck as far as he could go.

The men were the rowdiest of all, tired but celebrating their victory with drumming and a chorus of bad singing and trying to drown their loss in mead, which they would pay for later in unmercifully pounding headaches. Alekt snatched up a flagon for himself and slunk to the corner where he usually worked on his drawings, shedding the black cloak and immediately working on tending the wound to his shoulder. Hartvig let him be and joined in the food and drink, sharing laughs and old stories of conquest and years where the raiding of rival peoples were good and other years that weren't so good but still worth remembering.

When the sun began to set and cast a golden glow, the men began to settle, worn out between their battle and their party. Some passed out before ever reaching their proper beds, others actually managed to stagger to their piles of fur and blankets before falling unconscious.

It was then that Hartvig approached Alekt, who was busying himself with reviewing the sketches and drawings of the dragons and his designs for artificial wings, occasionally making a few corrective marks but mostly just staring at them.

"Everyone is turning in for the night," Hartvig announced, leaving a small trail-off for in case the younger boy had a reply. When Alekt

said nothing, he continued, "I was wondering what your orders might be for keeping watch, before none of these drunken lumps can be risen to keep watch."

"I don't believe it will be necessary. The trappers are either dead or too injured to cause a problem, and the same can be said for most of the dragons. I don't believe our Fury pair will be leaving either until their brethren are well enough to fly on their own, and we've given them plenty enough reason not to slit our throats in our sleep."

Hartvig nodded neutrally, though he was sure at least a few men would protest the logic were they of clearer mind. "Any orders for when the morning comes, then?"

Alekt sat back in his seat, looking thoughtful. "I want a patrol around the island sent out in the morning, as soon as you have a few men clearheaded enough to do so. Whoever is least comfortable with the presence of the dragons and most reactive would be best." Hartvig nodded his approval, waiting for Alekt to continue as the youth tiredly scratched the juncture of jaw. "The caged dragons will also have to go free in the morning, as per the agreement. If the food stores are starting to run low or spoil, there will also need to be a hunting party to replenish..."

Hartvig nodded. "Sounds like as good a plan as any." Alekt's gaze slid to something distant and unseen for a moment. Hartvig took notice. "Something on your mind?"

Silence was his only answer at first, then...

"I shouldn't have let him go." Hartvig was mildly surprised, straightening up a little more. "He wasn't ready. My plan was faulty and judgment in error. We could have gone ahead without him, and gotten the same result with no casualties."

Hartvig opened his mouth to protest, but halted himself, instead pursing his lips. He considered words of condolence, but he wasn't sure that Alekt would appreciate or want the gesture. For him to say anything at all, clearly he regretted the outcome, but there was nothing to be done for it now, and he didn't expect Alekt would grieve heavily.

In the end, he nodded and bowed his head in solemn agreement, thinking it the better response, at least in this case.

"Aye. It could have been thought out better. I expect you will ensure our losses are fewer the next time around."

Harsh, maybe, but as he understood it, that was the way of Alekt's clan. In younger years, he might have viewed them harshly just the same as most others, but he understood that it wasn't coldness for coldness's sake. It was a methodology of survival, calculating true needs above desires, weighing the consequence of action. Alekt especially had the future role of becoming a Chief to fulfill, and a Chief with no mind for how to at least minimize - if not prevent - loss was not one worth following. Even if Alekt was not the most feeling or compassionate soul, he was sharp enough to grasp that reality.

"Well, if that will be all, I think I need to rest these old bones. We've had a long and trying day."

* * *

><p>Alekt merely nodded, dismissing Hartvig with a subtle wave of his hand. The older man left, and the brunette was alone to his thoughts once more, mulling over designs and drawings. At least for a short while, but exhaustion was catching up with him as well, and he rubbed both his stinging, heavy eyes with the heel of his palms.<p>

Perhaps it would be best if he were to find rest as well. At the very least, he should give up working any longer on his drawings for the night, unable to give them much focus anyway.

Standing up stiffly, he pressed a hand underneath the breast of his crow partner, receiving a slight scolding from the tired bird that he deposited on his uninjured shoulder. The other one he'd cleaned out and stitched, but it burned fiercely, and the inflammation had yet to go down despite that he'd used some medicinal herbs on it already.

Stifling a yawn, he went to where his own blankets were strewn. He considered merely curling up amongst them where they were, but ended up picking them up instead and wandering from the cave. The smell of smoke and sweat and blood and mead and roasted meat and dragons all mingled together was a little much to his senses, and while other times he could tolerate it, now was not one of those times.

Outside, the air was clearer. The breeze was colder like his home in the deep mountains, and carried the sharp and less familiar smell of salt, hinted with a subtle waft of pine and fir that he knew well. It was dark, but he didn't take much notice, used to navigating in the dark almost as well as he could in the day, especially when he knew the territory. It was relatively easy to scale up some of the clefts, not far from the entrance.

More than that though, there was also the stars. That was one thing he didn't see often in his homeland. The clouds and driving snow usually blotted them out. Laying out his blankets first, he nestled comfortably on top of them, pulling the corners around his shoulders, while his crow companion shuffled to get comfortable on his chest. He was sure to partly cover her with the blankets too.

She croaked quiet affection and fluffed against the night chill, and he returned the sound, lightly scratching behind her head in the one spot that was hard to reach on her own. What came soon after was not from his companion, instead a flap of leather and a semi-heavy _thump_ of something landing and a series of low but non-hostile rumbles. Alekt recognized the sounds as _Tt-th-ss_ and could somewhat make out the dragon pair's shape and faces in the darkness, perching on a nearby ledge, though still keeping a certain distance.

He thought that maybe he saw something distantly akin to regret and sympathy, at least on _(click)-uhp's _face if not the Fury's, but the lack of light made it hard to tell. Clearly, at least, the feral brunette was searching for proper words, straightening up slightly on _Tt-th-ss_'s back.

"H-e-e-pp drakkkn, isss. _Tt-(click)-th-up-ss_ h-e-e-pp

pfikingr."

Alekt rolled the one sound he didn't quite know -
Tt-(click)-th-up-ss - over his tongue.

The other boy beamed and laid forward on his dragon's head, chirping in an agreeing sort of way and lightly drumming his fingers, repeating "_Tt-(click)-th-up-ss_ h-e-e-pp."

Alekt realized after some moments it was a combination of sounds, not a new one. Or rather a combined name, to be exact.

"Good," he returned, yawning widely. "Then you can start in the morning."

14. Chapter 14

****A/N:**** So I actually started another HTTYD fic called True Calling that's basically a modification of the last half of the first movie if anyone is interested in that, though I'm going to try and give priority to this until its done. I'll definitely be working on both though!

* * *

><p>Learning from the Masters
A How To Train Your Dragon Fanfiction
>Based off Le'letha's "Nightfall"

* * *

><p>It would be a lie for Hiccup to think to himself that he was not sad, but it was only a small amount. Pfikingr died all of the time, and he spared no thought towards it. Pfikingr were killers of dragons and all dragons knew this. Hiccup knows he is human in body, but he is not pfikingr no matter his shape, and in soul he is all dragon. He knows this. Toothless knows this. So does the rest of their nest. Only sometimes do stranger dragons notice. It does not matter to him or them his shape, for he has always been a part of the nest and so he is a dragon. This is truth as he sees it.

He has never thought much of pfikingr deaths because of this. He cannot relate to them and he can barely understand them, because he is not them and most of them are bad killers enemies threat. Even when Uh strrrrTT had come to him convinced that he cared to make the Queen dragon's nest stop raiding because pfikingr were being killed, he could not find himself to care for them - only for the dragons Uh strrrrTT's kind killed. She did not care for dragon deaths, only for pfikingr deaths, and he felt much the same only in reverse.

This time is different though.

A pfikingr died to save dragons from other pfikingr. Hiccup and Toothless realize this and that is what makes them sad and also surprised and thoughtful. Its a blatant contradiction to everything they know of what dragons and humans are to each other. Even the idea of humans fighting other humans for dragons at all is something they had never considered before now. They know pfikingr fight other

groups of their own sometimes, but so do dragons against others that are not of the same flock, usually to defend a territory or prey they have caught or hatchlings from bigger dragons. They have seen it in other predators and other prey-things too, so it is not beyond their world view to know that humans dispute with rival humans.

But the reason is never for dragons, and this is what matters to them. This was done for dragons. That is something they cannot ignore as they could if it had been done for pfikingr only, though they are not so dull minded that they do not realize it was done for both.

The two-who-are-one understand what it is to help in return for help. That is the entire basis for their relationship. Toothless can fly and breathe fire and he is bigger and fiercer; Hiccup is smaller but he has clever paws that do things no other dragon's can and can reach tight spaces Toothless cannot and can sometimes talk to pfikingr in ways that benefit them even if his attempts are clumsy and he wishes that humans were better at speaking properly like dragons. Even if Hiccup does not have a tail and fire, he is good for Toothless and good for the Nest because he has things to offer no other dragon does; his uniqueness is as much a needed advantage as it is sometimes a handicap, and he has found ways to lessen his differences like making himself his own wings so that he can fly too even if it is not as well as his kin.

Other dragons understand returning help for help too. It is how a nest survives, and a good nest has much helping and does better than other nests. It is not hard to know that two dragons working together is better than one, and many dragons together are stronger than few dragons, just as many pfikinger are more of a threat than one or two of them.

It is these things - that a human died to help dragons, and that they understand returning helping - that drive their decision. They do not trust E-e-kTT, and they do not trust his flock, but they can see them as not enemies, the same as they might see a dragon who is not of their flock but minds its own business and shows no desire to be a threat so they tolerate it.

It is strange to think, but they have seen a little of humans who can tolerate dragons without being a threat, and once they have even seen Uh strrrrTT climb on the back of another dragon called Flies in Storms and fly with them though she is much more clumsy than they are and more afraid of flying but mostly of falling from flying. And it is another thing that Hiccup's mother was human in body even if Cloudjumper saw in her dragon, though he tries not to think of it, because thinking of it hurts and the hurt is not an enemy that can be fought and blasted with Toothless's fire into going away.

But these are places he can think of where pfikingr might be less-bad with dragons than he thought before those times and so they are willing to give it a chance because E-e-kTT does not want to fight dragons, his enemy is other pfikingr, though it is hard to tell his intentions beyond his words because he does not show what he thinks or feels in his face or his body and so it is hard to know if he lies. It is for that also that they think they should maybe stay around longer to know for-sure that E-e-kTT and his flock will not turn out to be lying.

E-e-kTT may not have _killed_ dragons, but they both remember how he had captured them and the sharp, flying thing that had hurt Toothless's wing as well as the many days apart in cages and while most _pfikingr_ were stupid and easily fooled, E-e-kTT was clever. Clever was a good thing when it was something the members of their flock had, but they are practiced at being clever and know from experience the kind of trouble it can bring, not only to themselves but also how it can be turned against enemies. A clever _pfikingr_ can easily become a dangerous one, far more dangerous than most, who already threatened dragons.

So there are many reasons for them to stay but they still know to be careful around _pfikingr_ and they won't let themselves be ambushed again and with Cloudjumper there they are more formidable than ever if the humans become violent.

They agree to help E-e-kTT for helping the dragons and E-e-kTT seems to approve so they deem that everything is good.

E-e-kTT doesn't sleep amongst his flock that night and instead perches on the rocks curled in furs skinned from animals and fluffy white prey things that they both have seen with _pfikingr_ and that are even more stupid than _pfikingr_ are. Hiccup knows that furs are soft and warm but for him they are rarely needed and get destroyed quickly in a dragon nest. Hatchlings especially like to play with them and pull from different sides and shred them so big pieces of fur do not last long in the Nest. The shreds can still be used to sleep in but they are not as good and by then they are often burned by dragons' fires.

It is humorous too how E-e-kTT and the crow are to each other similar to how Hiccup and Toothless are, only the one that can fly is the bird while E-e-kTT is the one who is too big for her to fly-with even though it is what E-e-kTT wants.

Hiccup can sympathize a small amount because he knows that flying is a _good_ thing and he cannot imagine life without being able to fly. What confuses him most is that E-e-kTT needs dragons to learn how when he has a bird who can fly just as well, but he knows it took him many tries to make his own wings that would work, so maybe it is the same problem of tries-and-fails. Hiccup spent many times simply staring at the wings of his nestmates trying to work out why his previous tries had not worked until he got it right so maybe E-e-kTT was trying to do the same though it would be harder for a _pfikingr_ when dragons avoided them so much.

He did not think that E-e-kTT wanted to be like dragons, but maybe he wanted to be like birds. That is better - Hiccup thinks - because birds can be annoying to dragons and the Nest, but they are not a threat.

After morning arrives is when E-e-kTT awakes, shivering slightly from the cold but he otherwise gathers up his blankets and returns to the cave without a sound about it. Only half of the other _pfikingr_ are awake but they are sluggish and unhappy, low-growling at nothing and rubbing their faces with their paws and occasionally snapping at each other so the two-who-are-one keep their distance in case the _pfikingr_ try to snap at them too though so far they have seen no sharp-things bared.

E-e-kTT speaks to them in human and those that are already awake leave on the backs of the no-prey things shortly after. It is after that that E-e-kTT keeps his promise to start letting the uninjured dragons free, but not without first asking for their help to communicate properly for them to wait and be still for a time outside the cage so E-e-kTT can draw them. Some of the dragons barely listen and do not want to stay still and do not care for what E-e-kTT has drawn. Some even flee before he is finished, especially when other _pfikingr_ start to wake up. One is curious and comfortable enough to wait and see what E-e-kTT has drawn of them before leaving.

What is most interesting is that E-e-kTT lays out long ropes every time with knots in them. Hiccup and Toothless understand knots. Hiccup understands them more because he has used his clever paws to undo many knots to free nestmates from traps and open things that are tied shut and he has made simple knots in sewing things with string like making or fixing the fly-with on Toothless's back. _Pfikingr_ make lots of knots. They are useful for many things and some are harder to undo than others.

Hiccup does not know at first what the knots are for this time but he assumes they have a purpose because _pfikingr_ have many uses for them and E-e-kTT seems to put importance on laying them out on the ground before he draws and has made it clear he does not want them moved at all. Hiccup wants to understand _why_ they are important because knots are something he can use to benefit himself and his nestmates sometimes and he knows that there are good knots and bad knots. Good knots are strong and do not come apart or break but bad knots can create unintended danger depending on what he is using them for. This is something he has learned the hard way before with the fly-with and with his own wings that he made for himself.

He learned quickly that he could perch in E-e-kTT's blind spot without being shooed away and watch him work while Toothless watched his own back for _pfikingr_ that might get too close. He knew better than to think E-e-kTT did not know he was there though and that the _pfikingr_ was only pretending not to see him.

There were faded lines on the paper all the way down it and Hiccup catches E-e-kTT's attention by whistling a question that the he-_pfikingr_ can't quite figure out though Hiccup sees he is trying to discern the meaning. E-e-kTT's eyes are more expressive than he remembers but to him this is a good thing because it is a communication he can understand and react to much better than human words.

He subtly directs at the paper and whistles a question again. At first E-e-kTT points at the drawing of the dragon. When Hiccup denies that as the point of interest, it takes E-e-kTT a few more moments to realize its the lines and Hiccup rumbles approval when he guesses it right. He doesn't expect a verbal answer he can understand and he doesn't get one. E-e-kTT says some words he doesn't know, but he also lifts his drawing stick and points, lining it up with one of the knots, then the second knot, then the many after that.

It doesn't take long then to figure out what the knots are for once E-e-kTT shows him though he still doesn't know why they are important because he has always drawn without such things himself. He whistles yet another question since E-e-kTT seems to understand what the sound means but the rest is too abstract for him to convey properly. He

gets no further in coaxing an explanation but he has a slightly better idea of what things are being done.

E-e-kTT draws all of the dragons and they go free. They are happy with this. That is when E-e-kTT wants to draw Toothless-love the same way and the larger dragon is less eager about this but there is no threat in doing it so he makes little fuss and tolerates it and stands poised with his wings and tail stretched out. Hiccup likes watching E-e-kTT draw Toothless most of all. He has never seen anyone else draw Toothless and it is fun and fills him with a happy purr.

He thinks then that he can help too - he and Toothless are two halves of one and Hiccup has his own wings - so as soon as he sees that E-e-kTT is done drawing Toothless, he springs down to where Toothless is standing and he spreads his own wings even though he cannot fly with them here where there is no wind chirping Me too flying wings mine us flying wings me too!

Toothless rolls his eyes as he sits back at the antics of his dragon-boy half and lightly cuffs him with silly you mine silly affection hatchling-happy showoff silly. Hiccup laughs a dragon laugh with his Toothless-soul-mine at his partner's joke because he is proud of his wings and that he can fly at all but he still knows they are not as good to show off as Toothless's wings.

Hiccup can see that E-e-kTT is mildly surprised by his wings and he considers this a good thing. Pfikingr often see him as different from Toothless but this to them is wrong. He is half of Toothless and Toothless is half of himself. They cannot be without the other. He knows now that it is his shape as a human but he is all dragon in everything else. E-e-kTT does not seem to care to tell him what he is or tell him no. He draws anyway as if he sees just another dragon and this makes him infinitely happier even if E-e-kTT does not see all dragon in him and is only interested in his wings.

When E-ek-TT is done he makes a noise and Hiccup is free to move again and leap onto Toothless's back and the two can approach E-e-kTT to see though they still do not get too close. The papers of them are held up and both of Tt-(click)-th-uhp-ss are drawn. Hiccup is pleased with it but he chatters to Toothless good like happy good you like yes you me good? and Toothless answers back yes good you me good like yes happy ofcourse.

E-e-kTT seemed to be done once they were happy with it and moved from where he was sitting to a table where a small flame glowed on a stick of wax.

Hiccup knows wax and he doesn't like it. When it is cold it is harmless, but when there is fire wax melts but it is not like ice. Ice becomes water when it melts but wax becomes a sticky fire-water that grabs anything it touches and stings like bees that cannot be swatted off. He and Toothless have had many encounters with bees and once by chance they learned that bees cannot swim and don't like deep water so if they dive then they are safe from bees but wax that is biting and stinging only hardens faster and is harder to rip off after being in cold water but it is also impossible to rip off before it has turned hard and cooled without getting more stung and burned. He and Toothless will risk getting stung by bees because there is honey to be gained and they like the taste of it but there is no

reward for being stung by wax so it is a thing to be avoided when it is on-fire.

It is that which makes him wary and he decides he does not want to go near E-e-kTT and the wax and instead they turn towards the empty cages where the rescued dragons are curled outside of them. The stranger dragons are wary but not hostile of both _Tt-(click)-th-uhp-ss_ and the _pfikingr_ and they keep a comfortable enough distance and show they are not a threat but friendly, thrumming a greeting and whistling a question _you here good safe yes good curious hurting maybe you howareyou?_

They know the dragons are not better yet as they can see the wounds and smell blood and sickness but they are away from _bad pfikingr_ and so when they are better they can leave when they want when they couldn't before.

One of the stranger cousins that lifted their head returns _wary hurting hurting bad confused hurting relief uncertainty relief threat nothreat humans confused hurting hungrytired bad hungry_.

Stay you hungry food we us find stay rest we good find food, Hiccup tells them before he and Toothless prowl for food. They had seen before how E-e-kTT had brought dragons in cages food and so he thinks that it must be okay to find food from the _pfikingr_. He knows from many years being a good thief the places where _pfikingr_ hide food in barrels and boxes and so that is where he looks and his nose tells him where to find fish where he cannot see them.

It is when they knock over a barrel that the _pfikingr_ notice and one of them shouts and starts to run. It is a bad sign they know too well and their first instinct is to go on the defensive, Hiccup leaping onto Toothless's back as they snarl. Its enough to make the _pfikingr_ hesitate and rethink challenging them but all the same Toothless's wings are spread to fly and his back legs bunched beneath him to launch into the air. They know that this is a _pfikingr_ nest and that they are only tolerated by many in it so they will flee if they are attacked if they get a choice between fleeing and fighting but they will defend themselves and each other if they are cut off from escape.

E-e-kTT whistles at them sharply and earns the _pfikingr's_ attention to wave them away and the two-who-are-one can see that the _pfikingr_ is reluctant but obeys and leaves them alone. They relax but are unsure if E-e-kTT is letting them take the fish or if they are stealing but if it is a problem they figure that E-e-kTT will have told them No so they roll the barrel to the other side of the stone-nest where they dragons are and break it open. The other dragons are wary but eager and hungry and don't waste time in eating. Hiccup and Toothless are hungry too but they are strong and fit and they can catch their own prey while the wounded dragons cannot so they let the wounded dragons have all of the fish and leave to hunt for their own.

It is after they are filled with fish and content that they return and while they do not think there will be danger they are careful to scan from above before landing and are cautious to step back into the cave at first until they are able to see every side of it and assure themselves that the _pfikingr_ will not attack them when they return.

Not much has changed but they are curious that E-e-kTT has not moved and he still has his drawings out and Hiccup especially wants to see what he plans to do with the drawings of dragons so they approach cautiously. He whistles curiously to get E-e-kTT's attention and immediately the He _pfikingr_ knows what he wants to see and shows them.

They are drawings of wings that are not attached to anything and there are many variations of them but they look mostly-the-same to him and some are not finished being drawn. Some of them are like Hiccups wings and are shorter and others are long like proper wings. Hiccup hasn't managed to figure out how to make wings for himself like Toothless's or Cloudjumper's though so he is not sure how E-e-kTT plans to make his own bigger wings but he secretly hopes he might learn a way to do so for himself because while he does not like _pfikingr_ he knows they can make interesting and magical things.

Most of them make him happy but there are two that make him especially excited. Hiccup wants better wings but he is glad to have any at all and he can still fly. What he _doesn't_ have is a tail and two pairs of wings that E-e-kTT has drawn have _tails_ on them. Hiccup wants a tail as much as he wants wings but he has never figured out yet how to make a good tail but seeing E-e-kTT trying to make wings with a tail too makes him gleeful.

He already has many reasons to stay and help E-e-kTT but now he has another, and this new reason is the most irresistible he can think of now.

15. Chapter 15

****A/N: ****So I meant to be more active updating this but then sort of fell off the face of the earth, primarily because I've been busy in need of a job and I haven't had a single day off in probably 2 months at least and on the one weekend I actually finally got a break I woke up to having Bursitis in my hip, which basically means the joint cushions are inflamed and cause excruciating pain, and a tree fell on and killed one of my neighbors about ten feet from where I live, all in the same day, and the quite obvious aside, we couldn't get our car out because it was in the area that was quartered off for emergency crews to deal with the whole affair so we couldn't get to the doctor's that day. Some luck, huh?

The good news is I got really strong ibuprofen from the doctor afterwards so my hip doesn't hurt so much. I also got a new subsidized internship a few weeks ago, but as it turns out (and expected) the company is just using it as free labor and doesn't really intend to hire, so I have to find another, more permanent job.

* * *

><p>Learning from the Masters
A How To Train Your Dragon
Fanfic
>Based off of Le'letha's "Nightfall"

* * *

><p>Two days after Alekt finished gathering his drawings of dragons and their wings and tails is when it becomes busy. This time it isn't hunting and capturing dragons alive, nor is it planning to raid a rival Viking camp for their dragons or supplies or anything of the like. This is something a little different, but its something that Norsemen are almost as famed for as their viciousness.

The late morning was filled with orders and activity. The horses were given a proper stretch and warm-up for work and the carts readied for them to pull. The dragons - the Fury pair included - were alert and watched with a sort of edgy wariness and kept their distance as men gathered axes and pickaxes, milling about the entrance.

There were three groups, each with an assigned task; one to gather large stones, another for tree-chopping, and the last for gathering brush and smaller wood and branches. Only two men stayed behind. Alekt accompanied the rest out. He figured that curiosity had won out once the grouping Vikings had left the cave enough that _Tt-(click)-th-uhp-ss_ followed to observe and find out what they had planned.

One group spent a good part of the day locating loose boulders and stones of all sizes, and other pieces they found that were good for their purpose and just needed a little bit of chipping to separate them from larger stones and walls. With a team of four horses pulling from the front, and several of the men pushing the cart from behind, they relocated the collected stones back to their camp in the cave, arranging them to form a sort of shallow pen in one corner. Every stone was placed meticulously and with a purpose to keeping the whole structure together, with open slots running the entire length one way to form rows.

The group gathering dry brush and twigs and similar material returned next. Brittle grass and leaves and other flammables were packed into the long slots in the stone with coals, and then more stones were added on top, deepening the rock pile, and another layer of brush was packed in. A last top layer was added to form a flat platform.

The Fury pair hung back but were watching curiously, making noises that sounded curious and interested but undeniably still cautious. Like the wild things they were, they kept what they deemed a safe distance and stayed out of the way of the men, who worked and barely even took the time to notice the two, or at least did a good job pretending not to.

The last thing they needed then was the wood, which arrived in the form of a tree trunk cut into segments, each somewhere between three and four feet long. With many heavy, downward swings of an axe, they sheared the outer bark from all the sides, then split each log into two halves with a large maul axe and some hammers.

Norsemen were known for a lot of things - their savagery; their metal weaponry; their Pagan gods - but there was another thing that they were well known for, and that was their woodworking. Judging from the somewhat startled, awed look from the feral dragon rider as they worked, he guessed that _(click)-uhp_ was getting a crash course in exactly _how_ Vikings made the things they did.

They went through splitting huge log chunks with practiced precision.

One log was laid out where it wouldn't move and escape as one man brought the maul down hard so that it bit into wood. Then from each side, two others took their turn to hammer it in, interchanging with perfect timing like opposite human pistons - _one, two; one two; one, two_ - until the solid piece cracked in half and either side fell in opposite directions. Then another segment of tree trunk - _THWACK, one-two, one-two, one-two_, and so on, and so on.

By the time all three tasks were fully done and the horses unhitched, the men were tired and hungry, as were the horses, so he dismissed them to go about whatever they chose for the rest of the night. Alekt still had his own work he intended to do, so he didn't retire the same as the rest to cook, eat, and tell stories. He retreated to his usual table off to the side, taking a couple of the trunk halves with him.

The last couple of days he'd spent tirelessly pouring over his drawings and trying to do calculations. Wings that were too big like those of a Timberjack wouldn't be workable. Small wings like those of a Gronkle wouldn't work very well either with how quick they had to flap to stay airborne. Finding the right balance in size was a good portion of the trick, but so was shape and angles. There was a lot to account for, and there was no guarantee of his plan for false wings working.

He had studied birds as well, but birds were another matter entirely. They were smaller and built lighter than humans, though it was to his own advantage that he was relatively small and thin himself. It wasn't simply a matter of coming up with something that would get himself off the ground - though it was a start - but to also figure out a design that would work for his heavier fellow Vikings. In that regard, dragons were a much better model to work from.

And then there was also _(click)-uhp_.

Just a few days ago, he'd seen the feral man splay out what looked like crafted wings of his own, albeit more like a flying squirrel than a dragon. He wondered exactly how practical they were in reality, or if they were merely aesthetic. If it turned out the dragon-man could actually fly with them, then that at least proved it could be done and that his time wasn't wasted on the endeavor. He wouldn't be able to say for sure though until he saw it for himself.

What he had in mind wasn't really the same kind of thing, though he would certainly consider the design if it proved useful, maybe with a few tweaks of his own. It would be more accurate to say that he wanted to glide than actually _fly_, because he wasn't so sure humans had enough strength and energy in their arms to use the same as birds or dragons, but something that could stay in the air long-term was the intended goal.

It was with that in mind that he was working on a frame. It had to be lightweight enough to stay in the air but strong enough to hold the weight of a person. Spruce was the best available to him at the moment. He took his while to refine one of the blocks into more of a slab and then drew out lines for the frame shape of the wings with a piece of charcoal. The smaller pieces he'd shaved off the edges he made into small blocks, only maybe an inch or two thick, and figured out their placement following the lines in places where he wanted the

frames to be bent, nailing them in firmly to where they wouldn't swivel or become misaligned.

He caught the motion of a black shape in the corner of his sight and turned his head to where the Fury pair were as they returned, plopping down near the recovering dragons and talking with them in their own language. What had once been some confusion and wariness - Alekt guessed they were not dragons that knew each other from the same group before now - had turned into more comfort and relaxed stances between the Fury pair and the rescued dragons.

The injured dragons were still visibly wary of him and his men, and Alekt was mindful to give them their distance, but they seemed fine with `_(click)-uhp_` and `_Tt-th-ss_`. With that being the case, he left the dragons to the dragon-man. He wondered if it had been explained that they were free to go whenever they were well enough to, but he supposed he could always try asking. `_(click)-uhp_` seemed to understand enough human tongue for that particular subject.

Going back to work, he separated off a few more pieces of wood, refining them into longer strips of wood. For now, they were just straight bars, and he was still shaping them with careful swipes of a blade, but eventually they would be the frames that held everything together.

Its while he's still working on it that he saw the dragon-pair approaching, but he found that they were more willing to get close when he didn't make a point of acknowledging their presence until `_(click)-uhp_` indicated for his attention with a few curious clicks. Any and everything crafted that wasn't a weapon, the dragon-man seemed to have an infinite curiosity for. As far as he was concerned, that was a good thing, because it meant there was a higher likelihood the Fury and rider would stay longer and potentially help them more.

Questioning eyes were all that he needed to know that `_Tt-(click)-th-uhp-ss_` wanted to know what he was doing. Grabbing the paper with his blue-prints, he pointed to the bar of the wings on the paper, and then at the wood he was working on and the frame for setting the shape. `_(click)-uhp_` hums in a way that says he only understands half of it. The next sounds - chattering and a whistle Alekt recognized as a question and a sound like wood splitting - cleared up what he found confusing, after a few moments considering how to decipher it.

"Normally, yes," Alekt nodded, picking up one of the smaller scrap pieces and bending it till it broke. "Dry wood. But with hot water or steam," he said, picking up a cup of water and making a noise and motion with his hand to indicate fire, "you can make it bend." Taking another piece and flexing it without breaking, he indicated 'no' and then a snapping sound.

`_(click)-uhp_` looked as though he at least understood the gist of it and chattered wonderingly with `_Tt-th-ss_`. As he expected, a lot of the crafting arts were entirely unknown to `_(click)-uhp_`. He'd thought of boiling and bending the wood in the morning, but decided now was as fine a time as any. If nothing else, he could explain and prove through real result what he was talking about.

Straightening up - he noted that the Fury rocked back a little bit

when he did, intent on keeping a comfortable distance - he picked up the slab frame for setting the shape and the pieces that would be the skeleton of the wings and went to the pile of rocks and debris they'd gathered.

The first thing was lighting up the kindling, using a piece of flint and stone to make sparks, and then giving the embers breath until they grew into a flame, feeding it further with a large bellow made of wood and leather. After that were the pots that he set atop it and filled with water. It would take a while for the water to reach its boiling point, so he spent that time further refining the edges of the wing frames.

When both were to his satisfaction, and the water hot, he slid them in and covered it. It would take some time before the boiling would be done, so he occupied _(click)-uhp_'s attention in the mean time with how to weave cordage rope from the left over inner bark and roots, since he would need it already anyway. After a couple of hours, he retrieve the long wood pieces and wedged them into the shaping frame.

The hardest part was trying to communicate that the frames needed to be left alone to cool and set their shape, though he managed to get the message across most of the night and until early morning. By the time Alekt was up, _(click)-uhp_ and his dragon companion were already prying the frames free with curious whistles and chirps, the smaller of the two testing the strength of them with trying to bend them into some other form with his full weight. Much to Alekt's own satisfaction, they survived the stress amazingly well and held their new shape.

Caught red-handed, _(click)-uhp_ retreated back to the side of the Fury as Alekt approached, watching for what he'd do with them now and thrumming in interest.

He needed a central frame to keep it all together, which was his next task, crafting a top and bottom piece that would fit together and having to carve out slots for the base of the wing skeleton to fit into. It was time-consuming, but he took his while to make it an exact match so it would all fit together snugly. The last part - at least for this first prototype, since he was predicting he'd need to make changes - was fitting the whole frame with something to keep it airborne.

He pondered whether leather or ship canvas would be the better option. Leather was the more readily available material though, and would be more water-resistant than cloth would. They have boar and deer hides already. When they have to hunt again to re-supply on meat, they'll have even more.

(click)-uhp is less interested in his stitch-work than he was in the wood bending or rope-weaving, maybe understandably so if he made his own clothing and saddle. They already had leathers which were cured, tanned, oiled, and dried - though he would have to have more done that way to create more wings after he worked much of the kinks out with his prototype - so all he needed to do now was cut and sew.

Once again, the trick was to make sure it was sturdy enough to stay in one solid piece, but light enough to catch air. Too heavy, and all

but the stormiest winds wouldn't take it off the ground. Luckily, strength was not something he needed to worry about; wild boar had some of the toughest skin of any species. He was more concerned about weight.

He cut the large pieces to fit where he needed them to against the frames, and the end pieces he used as strips to wrap around the wood skeleton and stitch to the larger pieces. The edges that went to the box halves where he set in the wood frames of the wings, he also slipped the edges in between and nailed it all together firmly, with the earlier woven cord stitched from wing-tip to frame so that the leather would have something to hold its form on the side opposite the wooden wing frames.

He'd already accounted for a way to hold onto it, with a small space between leather and frame closer to the base that he could slip his fingers through. The only thing left was to test his weight on it before giving it a first fly.

He accomplished that with some rope tied to a higher tree branch, with the dangling end tied around the thickest part of the frame, so that he could hang from the wings and see how much he could stress them with his weight and how well they'd hold. Better to test that now and have them break than to try and fly with them and careen from the sky.

One could always hope that _Tt-(click)-th-uhp-ss_ might actually look out for him if something went wrong and he fell, but he couldn't take the off-chance that they'd simply let him fall to his death either, and that seemed more likely than them saving him.

He did a lot of pulling, twisting, and bouncing from the frame, and everything held as it should. None of the nails came loose or the stitching undone. Now, all that was left for them was a good wind.

* * *

><p>In the night, there was a tension in the air. He knew it well, because that was what was most familiar to him. The breeze was crisper and humid, heralding the promise of a storm. In the morning, there were incoming clouds, and by afternoon, the winds had picked up considerably. There would be rain some time before the sun set, but for now, the sky was clear of droplets.<p>

He missed that tension. Where he came from, there were many harsh storms. Even when the storms ceased, there was still that feeling in the air, and in the seas, there was usually a similar looming presence. Lately the air had been too calm and relaxed for his liking. The air of an incoming storm was more like home.

When the first peel of thunder broke, it became clear that he was not the only one enjoying the shift.

(click)-uhp and _Tt-th-ss_ immediately noticed, but they had been somewhat more fidgety all morning. There was a lot more chatter, and _-(click)-uhp_ - who had previously been drawing on extra sheets of paper, which Alekt communicated was okay so long as he stayed away from his own plan drawings of wings - yelped an excited dragonic sound and clamored onto the Fury's back. The Fury cried its own similar sounds of excitement, quickly stretching out its wings as if

to take off any second.

Standing, Alekt shed his usual cloak, which would be more of a hassle and only get buffeted by the wind if he wore it. He whistled at the Fury-pair before they could take off, the same moment that he was retrieving the wings he'd crafted, so that they could figure out that he wanted them to wait for him before dashing off. Flying, though he knew how it worked, was a new experience to him, and a familiar one to them. Even if they had no intention of actively teaching him, he could at least go off of observation.

By the time he caught up to the dragon and rider at the cave mouth, they were faintly trembling, but not with any sense of fear. They launched as soon as they saw him reach where they were, up onto the rocks above.

Climbing with the assembled wings was much more hazardous than he'd first predicted. The winds were consistent, leaving little if any breaks between gusts. A few times climbing up the rocks, he was almost carried off before he was out of the ravine and ready to do so, though luckily he managed to stay clinging to the rocks with his sickles.

He climbed until he found a higher, small cave, the wind blowing into it so it wouldn't carry him or the wings off never to be seen again. He tied the base of it to his back properly before ascending higher, which took all of his concentration and careful movements(he made a mental note to try for a design where he could fold the wings in in the next model), before reaching a space that was fairly open and clear of things to run into.

The only thing that kept him grounded were his weapons, hooked into small crags and ledges in the rock, but if not for that, the winds would have already carried him upwards. He sheathed one of the blades, one hand holding the frame of the wings, continuing to hold onto the rock with the other, and drank in the static air, feeling it whip his hair back and sting at his eyes; and the heft of the wind under the wings he made.

The Fury landed next to him, boy and dragon crooning curious encouragement. _(click)-uhp_ spread the webbings of his clothing, which the wind buffeted greedily, but stayed well-placed on the Fury's back; _Tt-th-ss_ opened up his own and was effortlessly lifted airborne from the rock, well into the sky in only moments.

Inhaling deeply and exhaling, Alekt similarly let go of the rock, kicked up, and let the wind catch underneath the wings.

Even for someone with nerves like steel, the first few seconds were enough to make him queasy. The feeling of ice that ran through him was because of more than just the cold gale sending goose bumps across his exposed skin. It was hard to say if the wind rushing through his nose and mouth was responsible for making it so hard to breathe, or how rapidly the land was shrinking below him, while the heavy winds tried to launch him sideways instead of ahead.

Steadying himself in the air and getting the angles and direction he wanted was much harder than he thought it'd be, trying to bank his weight to one side, and then compensate by angling himself the other way when it was too much. The slightest change in angle or direction

had a huge effect on his momentum and direction, and drastic changes were not even considerable.

For someone that prided himself on getting small details right in everything he did, the subtleties of flying were a lot more complicated than he gave proper credit towards.

Even so, while difficult and admittedly terrifying, it was also exhilarating. There was no other experience like it, or even close to describing it. Sailing the oceans; climbing great trees or mountains; fighting blade-to-shield to victory; or even fighting against creatures much bigger and fiercer like sharks or bears or dragons.

There was nothing else in the world that he could think of that was like flying. There was nothing else that could match the pull of the sky, lifting him higher than any Viking, maybe even any human anywhere in the world(present company of dragon-man excluded), had ever gone. Heights that, before now, were impossible for anything not already born to the sky.

He closed his eyes - he didn't need to see to know which way was up, and they were too high for trees and cliffs here to run into - and felt the movements and the wind with his whole body, letting instinct and intuition be his guide, getting an idea for the currents and streams of wind that he couldn't see but he could feel tug at his hair and ghost over his flesh, curving all around him, and roaring in his ears.

This was what he'd wanted.

This was what he'd been missing.

Flying was living.

Feeling a little steadier, he cracked his eyes open, observing now that he was starting to get the hang of it, though it still took a lot of concentration and effort to adjust his movements accordingly. The island was well below and the winds had taken him a fair distance off-coast of it already, but he wasn't terribly worried. So long as the winds continued - and he knew that they would - he could figure out directions and movement back towards it.

It was only now that he watched the Fury and (click)-uhp in the air, the rider on Tt-th-ss's back, making the task look effortless, but he imagined that - for them - that truly was the case. This was not even close to a new experience for them. Without doubt, it was as common and natural to them as walking or running was for most other species.

(click)-uhp whooped with joy and untangled his hands from the saddle he'd made to stay on Tt-th-ss's back and leapt off fearlessly, only off-setting the dragon's flight path by a small margin, before spreading his own limbs and gliding with the crafted webbing of his clothes easily. The animalistic cries of the dragon-man were ecstatic and filled with laughter, gliding comfortably. He made it look easy as well, likely as practiced as his Night Fury companion.

It gave Alekt confidence, but not envy; he didn't expect to be that

good at flying on his first try, and he wouldn't try to catch up to being that good on his first attempt either. Everything took practice; skill came with experience, and experience took time and repetition. In time, he would grow to be good at it, but even flying at all, truly flying, high in the air, was a good start.

(click)-uhp and Tt-th-ss swooped upward and down, banking and turning at will - Tt-th-ss much more easily using his tail; (click)-uhp a little less so with his whole body - and seeming to know just how to move on instinct to go wherever they wanted. At one point they let an updraft keep them aloft, facing each other and simply twirling in a full circle, crooning and warbling and trilling happily.

They didn't even really seem to notice or care that he was there at all, when normally they were vigilant and wary. Now though, they were relaxed and complacent with his presence. Probably because this was a place they were very at-home in, and by comparison, he was only like a hatchling that barely grew into its wings, clumsy and unthreatening.

Having gotten comfortable with keeping his balance and at least being able to somewhat control his forward direction, he decided that he would try and get a feel for more complicated maneuvers, even though he was still working on the most basic control. Even if he made a mistake, they were incredibly high in the air, so he predicted he would have time to correct his course before ending up in a dangerous position.

He banked to the side with a shift of his weight and twist of his body, trying to adjust to the wind's pull and push and figure out exactly how much he needed to angle for the direction he wanted to go. It wasn't quite so easy as having a set amount that he had to turn. Sometimes it took only the slightest tilt, other times it took a great deal more effort and angle.

From so high above, he could see the ocean currents, divided and visible only by the waters traveling in different directions side-by-side, and the air was much the same, only with nothing to visually mark the separate currents. He had to feel the pull of the wind and how it changed from one place to another, and that was not an easy thing to do when he could only rely on physical touch and personal perception, and the wind currents were as varying and twisty as those in the ocean.

It wasn't merely a matter of figuring out his own positioning, but in reading which way the sky wanted to pull him, which was turning out to be a skill all its own, and the only other sort-of-human who could teach it could not be asked and could not explain it. Even if he could speak proper Norse, Alekt wasn't sure he would know how to teach it in more technical terms for someone of a technical mind like his own.

That left learning only by observing, and by doing.

(click)-uhp glided past him and angled to drift in a circle, whistling a shrill sound that he took to be a question. The dragon-man usually made the sound when he was curious or unsure and wanted something shown or explained.

This time was undertoned in amusement and he could only guess his (likely not very good) attempts at flying were humorous, but then, flying Vikings probably sounded like the punch-line of some terrible joke, just like flying pigs(or sheep, depending on the village).

As much as he was enjoying himself, the air was cold, and he would have to land some time, preferably before he went numb or became exhausted. Now that he knew it was even possible to get airborne, he needed to work on improvements, which meant he needed to return to land, alive and preferably not maimed by a horrible crash.

He motioned with his head towards the island deliberately, hoping the message was clear enough. He was met first with a hough hough hough sound he assumed to be laughter directed at him before (click)-uhp angled himself and dove closer towards land. Alekt figured - not wrongly so - that if he followed the same path, the air current would take him downward. Even knowing that, and trying to let the wind do most of his work for him, it was tricky. (click)-uhp rejoined his dragon-partner part of the way down as they neared land, but Alekt remained in following them, unsure whether they minded or not.

As terrifying as his first taste of flight was, landing was a much more daunting task. Coming in too fast could still be lethal, and if it didn't kill him, it could still cause serious injury. He tried to align himself to the water, but the wind disagreed with his plan and he overshot the water by quite a ways, heading more towards the rocky hills. He decided he'd have to aim for the water on the other side, but he'd have to stay airborne long enough to reach it, and he couldn't get the right angles to steer where he needed to go.

He barely avoided a collision with an outcrop, and couldn't avoid running into a wall further out, though he tried to minimize the crash and pushed off and away from it with his legs. If not for the wind, his loss of momentum would have sent him falling, but the gusts kept him in the air long enough for the wing-tip to scrape the walls and off-site his direction into a downward spiral. By then it wasn't a long drop, but it was far enough that one of the wings snapped on landing and he got several decent scrapes and bruises rolling the rest of the way down.

He winced after untying himself from the device and sitting up, guessing he'd probably pulled something the wrong way in the roll. Couldn't be helped. If that was all he got away with, he considered himself lucky.

An audible thump alerted him to Tt-th-ss landing not far away and the dragon-pair rumbling in question, though he wasn't sure whether or not he'd call it concerned.

Sighing, he glanced at the broken piece of frame for the wing, still accounted for only because of the leather used as the webbing. If he could've simply steered the damn thing, he probably would've had a much easier time of it. The next model was definitely getting a tail.

>A How To Train Your Dragon Fanfic
Based off of Le'letha's
"Nightfall"***

* * *

><p>Hiccup still trembles with want want want fly up you us
at his Toothless-half. The clouds had already let loose promised rain
but it was light and the winds were still strong enough that he could
glide above but he wanted Toothless to join him and for them to go
up up up high above the sea and land again while the winds remained
good.

The fact that the E-e-kTT could not join them now didn't matter. He
did not need any but his Toothless-_mine_ as company and did not
particularly care if E-e-kTT could fly or not though it would be a
lie that he was completely disinterested because maybe he could
figure out a good way to make a tail and it was _so so so_ amusing to
watch a _pfikingr_ try to fly even if he crashed at the end.

That is fine though. Every hatchling crashes on their first flight.
That is just the way things are.

Hiccup is long passed the point of crashing. He has been flying a
long time " too many seasons to count, he only knows it has been
many " and Toothless has flown on his own wings even longer. He has
mastered all that he knows of flying.

For a first try, E-e-kTT did not fly too badly, but by comparison of
the two-who-are-one, he is clumsy at flying and that is to be
expected.

He finds humor in it anyway, even if he rumbled some sympathy because
the fall looked like it hurt and the first wings that E-e-kTT made
broke. It is not as bad as a dragon's wing breaking, crafted things
can be made again good as new without hurting or taking time to heal,
but it is unfortunate that his first try ends that way.

Hiccup doesn't ponder it long. Things that bother Vikings are
generally not things that bother him, unless they are things that
also bother dragons, and E-e-kTT does not look bothered either way
unless thinking hard is being bothered.

He thinks less of it and more of the wind under his own wings as he
twirls and catches the air to go higher. Flying is the _best_ thing
and in that way he can understand why E-e-kTT wants to be able to do
it. Flying is like breathing for him and his Toothless-_love_; it is
necessity. It is living and joy and laughter and goodness.

Briefly he wonders if all _pfikingr_ wish to fly or if it is only
this one, and maybe other creatures stuck on land like most
preythings or creatures stuck in the water might envy it. He doesn't
know, he wonders about it, but it isn't a thought he explores for
very long because it is not a problem he needs to solve for himself.
He enjoys flying on his own, but he has always been able to reach the
sky because of his flock, long before he made his own wings.

The winds are too good and he is too _happy_ and _free_ now to think
of it. He occupies his attention with Toothless as his
flying-partner love joins him in the air and they croon _love love
love you me we us devotion happy love flying good yes yes love us

flying together happy flying together me you us_.

For a while they occupy their attention with only themselves and the air, and then with some time hunting the waters for fish, but eventually the winds begin to lessen, and the rain comes harder. They like the wind, but they prefer to be out of the rain if they can help it and return to the cave before they can get much more wet.

The first thing they do when they return is check on the rescued dragons and roll a barrel that has lots of fish to them. Some of them still smell of _sickness_ and _infection_ and _wounded blood_-scent_. Most of them eat properly and are recovering well even so. Many of them will be able to fly at least a short distance away soon, and they know they will also feel better once the dragons are able to leave. They want to make sure E-e-kTT is not lying about letting them free.

One of them who heals the best and is the proudest is a cousin with red skin and wings bigger than Cloudjumper's, but it is all wing and head and neck with a very small body. The all-wings cousin greets them contently with a _you you here good you relaxed friendly you here fish fish mine fish?_ while there is a rock-skin cousin and a boom-sound cousin that perk up at the promise of food and a many-heads cousin that is less interested.

They greet back _relief glad good good yes fish fish you-and-you-and-you-and-youyouyouyou fish eat yes fish fish fish you fish_. All but the many-heads cousin eagerly dig in and they further encourage it _you too you too eat fish fish good stronger good fish eat yes yes_.

The many-heads cousin looks at the fish skeptically that the two-who-are-one nudge their direction and softly growls at them _no no want no want fish sick bad no you fish you no want bad sick refuse disgust no_.

The all-wings cousin is quick to try to sneak the fish but Toothless stomps and they growl at him _no you no bad! Youyouyouyou fish not-for-you no bad leave fish you!_

The all-wings cousin huffs at them, unhappy that they defended the fish when the many-heads cousin did not want it, but the many-heads cousin _must_ eat so it can get better and fly away from this place. Dragons who stop eating are dragons who do not survive, and sometimes sick-feelings lie about eating. They insist again _Youyouyouyou eat fish fish good stronger good no sick better eat you good yes yes fish fish!_

The many-heads cousin refuses again. This goes on for a while, even Hiccup growing frustrated with the dragon's stubbornness that could rival his own, but they outlast the dragon/s in patience and it finally does eat. They linger for a while to see if it really does get sick enough that the food comes back, but it doesn't, and they leave the dragons alone to rest.

They go to find where E-e-kTT is, which is hunched over a wood space where the _pfikingr_ keeps his paper things. Right now he is not busy with wings or drawings or parts of trees but instead entertaining the crow that seems to E-e-kTT what Toothless is to himself.

E-e-kTT dangles something from his paws that Hiccup recognizes as a spring only because of the many traps he has dismantled with his own clever paws. It is a very long spring that wiggles back and forth in the air in a way that tantalizes even him and his Toothless-heart of mine_ to want to play with it.

They will not get that close though, and the spring is not nearly as tempting as something like paper or food would be, so instead they stre-e-e-e-tch out across the stone floor and rub away itches against it, all the while still watching their surroundings carefully even now. They have been given little reason to believe this a dangerous place, but it is still a pfikingr nest, and while there are some humans that are less-bad than others and not enemies to dragons it is better to be careful.

They are sure that E-e-kTT sees them, but he is often unconcerned with them, or good at pretending so at least. Instead he taunts his crow-partner with the spring, dangling it to and fro, and it plays along rolling on its back and trying to grab it with claws and beak. It is hard to tell, but it is watching them warily even as it plays and manages to grab hold of some of the spring and is lifted up to dangle by E-e-kTT. It finds it fun to swing back-and-forth from and Hiccup laughs his own amusement.

E-e-kTT sets the bird back down and manages to pull the spring away from it, pressing it down between curled soft-claws/toes and holding it so that the gaps in the spring vanish and it is a solid piece. The crow flips back onto its paws and stares at it, experimentally mouthing it and crawing in a way that Hiccup reads as impatience.

E-e-kTT lets it go and the spring flies in the air, still good and not broken or loose like some of the ones Hiccup has played with after breaking traps meant for his kin.

The crow hops after it, but the spring comes in his and Toothless's direction, and he springs after it faster. The bird doesn't dare get too close to him or his dragon-love, but fluffs up its wings and complains with several raucous sounds that need little translation: its easy for Hiccup to figure out the meaning as mine mine mine mine mine!

Hiccup doesn't feel like sharing it back. It flew to him so clearly it wants him to play with it more and he counters back no mine mine mine now mine silly bird mine! and spreads his own wings to assure his message and challenge. The bird gives up because it is far smaller than him but side-eyes him with a quieter and shorter kre sound of spite. E-e-kTT turns his attention between them, but does nothing to get it back, which is good because Hiccup will not give it up easily anyway.

Hiccup purrs pride victory mine now mine ours gloating silly bird mine silly win us yes mine ours_ before turning his attention fully to the spring in his paws, testing it by pulling from both ends and letting one side go so it SNAPS and finding that it is a very good spring and it will make a fun toy. It makes an interesting whoosh-ooo-whoosh-ooo-whoosh-ooo sound when he spins it around by one end, letting most of it fly freely around and around and around.

Squishing it down proves more difficult than he'd first thought because the spring is so long and it wants to leap as soon as it's pushed into a crouch. He's determined though and presses it down between both paws even as Toothless is watching him and waiting for it to pounce and the spring is wiggling to get away and at one point it leaps sideways and smacks him in the face.

Toothless laughs _yowp yowp yowp_ at him and in all playfulness Hiccup laughs the same sound right back, annoyed though not with Toothless so much as the spring that doesn't want to make playing easy.

He finally manages to squish the spring all the way down and then let it free, watching it leap into the air and partway across the cave. Toothless, wasting no time, pounces after it to reach it first before it could fully escape, pinning it under his larger paws. Curiously, he lifted one up to glance at his captured toy, and as soon as he did, it sprung into the air again seeking freedom, almost leaping at his face too.

Hiccup took his turn to pounce and devoted more time to studying it once it was his again, stretching it as far as he could stretch his paws out and seeing how it would move when he let it go, either with both paws or only one, making it _snap_ audibly when he only let go of one side or the other at a time.

Laying on his back and purring at the entertainment, he pressed it down against his chest and let it leap upwards only to catch it when it came back down. Then, again. That was when Toothless was faster, biting it out of the air and rumbling a purr of his own.

No! Hiccup protested. _Mine!_

You no mine now Toothless teased, making a crunching sound with it in his jaws as he gnawed it with his teeth though it didn't break the spring.

Hiccup whined and wriggled on his back, using his rear legs to push him across the stone so he could grab the remaining end of the spring dangling from Toothless's jaws, sinking his claws into it. Toothless paraded around unhindered with a happy look, dragging Hiccup about the ground as his dragon-boy refused to let go of the toy.

Mine mine mine mine! Hiccup insisted.

No mine mine no you mine Toothless replied unashamedly, towing Hiccup around even as the other twisted around and put up a valiant tug-of-war, the bigger dragon gingerly stepping around his other half as he did so.

Mine mine give you give mine want want want! Hiccup insisted, holding onto it only with one paw at that point. The other he used to find that one irresistible spot of Toothless's jaw to scratch and coerce his partner-_love_ into defeat and let him have it back. It worked, sort of, since Toothless let it go, but it worked a little less on account of the larger between them falling forward right on top of Hiccup and knocking the breath from him.

It's more of an inconvenience than anything else. They might sometimes play rough but Toothless and the rest of the Nest have

never and would never hurt him.

Toothless thrums affection and playing and smug through the underside of his jaw against the smaller dragon under him. Hiccup hums back silly you amused love you love you and scratches his other-half's scales in the best places that make the bigger dragon splay out like a beached jellyfish and forget everything but the attention. He doesn't even mind Toothless's bulky head on top of his chest, which would make it somewhat difficult to spring up if one of the pfikingr attacked them, but he is still watching for that even now.

E-e-kTT though, who is still watching them passively, probably won't let them be attacked. At least not by his own flock of humans.

Its while he's distracted - on one side by Toothless, and the other by E-e-kTT and his human flock - that Hiccup doesn't see the crow that is steadily sneaking up on them in his blind spot until it already has a hold of the spring and hops away so that his claws snatch only air and stone when he twists around to catch it by surprise and keep the object, causing him to screech in exasperation at it.

He should know better than to turn his back to a crow. Unlike seagulls, they are truly sneaky thieves.

By now, Toothless is aware of it and Hiccup's shift in mood. They like to steal things that interest them, but they do not appreciate being stolen from in return, a fact Hiccup makes very obvious with mine thief bad you mine give sneaky bird no give mine!

If the crow understands, it isn't listening, continuing to the wood table and hopping up to its ledge in an easy bound and short flutter of wings, walking in a way that says pride mine tricked you smug with its motions, setting the spring in its beak down and sitting over it as if it was a branch to perch on. Even when E-e-kTT put a paw out for it, the bird crawed at him and nipped possessively, unwilling to give it up to anyone, even its human partner.

When E-e-kTT left it alone, the crow went back to watching Hiccup and Toothless with its head quirked to the side with a look that dared them to try and take it, confident that they wouldn't. With it being so close to E-e-kTT, that was true.

They were already closer than they would be to most other pfikingr. Uh strrrrTT they might get close enough to touch. The St-t-t-t-t-kk that was their mother's mate before she was Cloudjumper's and part of the flock, Hiccup would get close enough to touch.

E-e-kTT? No. Not yet, at least.

E-e-kTT said he was friends to dragons, and he showed it with saving the wounded dragons and not hurting the dragons he also captured and letting them free again after he drew them, but they still remembered being captured and separated and Toothless's wing being hurt by a flying sharp-thing and that E-e-kTT is cleverer than most. They still want to be cautious in case it is a lie.

Besides, there is something else Hiccup wants even more than the spring and if he makes too much of a problem he knows he might not

have his chance to steal it. The spring is a good toy, but it is not the best one.

Their attention is drawn by a whistling sound that Hiccup uses to voice question. It is E-e-kTT making the sound this time instead. He makes a motion directed at them both but a little more at Hiccup than Toothless. Hiccup recognizes the words human and dragon in there, though there are other sounds he doesn't know. Even so, he's able to decipher the meaning.

"Nuh," he denies. He gingerly touches a paw to Toothless's head, vocalizing, "Drakkkn," then at himself, repeating it. His form looks human, but he is dragon. Before Uh strrrrTT, everyone in the Nest realized his appearance except for him and simply didn't care, so he could not be bothered to care now either. He was simply a dragon born in the wrong skin.

E-e-kTT didn't protest or ask for further clarification, so it was a good guess he understood. It opened a path of curiosity though, Hiccup taking his own turn to question.

You crow you? It was fairly easy to communicate with gestures and a similar croaking sound that crows made.

E-e-kTT seemed to ponder that a moment, letting his eyes and posture talk more freely than he seemed to with other pfikingr. That is good though, because it speaks better to Hiccup and Toothless than pfikingr words do.

"No..." E-e-kTT hums after a moment, scratching his smaller bird partner with soft claws in affection. There were other sounds that were lost on the dragon-man, and then a "Yes". They could see it was one of those things that was harder to communicate with their limited range of common language.

You flying want want yes bird flying you__? Hiccup inquired, trying to make a motion like swooping up and down with a paw and bird noises. He seemed to be on the right track with that, and continued on with a motion to his chest and heart-fire, "crow hrrt, iss?"

E-e-kTT considered that, seeming to ponder more if he was understanding the concept correctly, before nodding slightly.

"Isss. Crow hrrt," Hiccup repeated, nodding in acceptance and then wrapping his paws over Toothless's head and purring a together sound and "Drakkkn hrrt." They were content like that, but another thing crossed Hiccup's mind and he couldn't help investigating the thought.

He whistled and directed to the large noprey things that the humans rode on their backs with something much like his and Toothless's own fly-with. They had spent time around the creatures but knew little about them, but if E-e-kTT was a crow at heart then what was his relation with the noprey's that could run with him on their back and hunt and fight dragons?

He clarified that his curiosity was of those specifically with a throaty click-cluk click-cluk sound that their hard stone-like paws made most often walking over rock.

E-e-kTT motioned to Hiccup and Toothless first, making the pfikingr sound for "Dragon", and then motioned in the direction of the large creatures with a new sound Hiccup didn't know.

"Hh-rrsss," he tried to repeat. E-e-kTT nodded in approval before whistling towards the large animal and making another sound. One of the many Hh-rrsss's perked up and began towards them in a heavy walk, its head and whole body swinging side-to-side. At first its head was down but it stood up taller when it got close, its eyes and nose large and taking in their scent.

E-e-kTT stood from his sitting perch, though he kept one arm tucked close to his body where it probably was still hurting from the fall at the end of flying, and walked a circle around the larger creature so that his side was facing it until reaching one broad shoulder, scratching it with soft claws. The hh-rrsss was less occupied with his presence and more with the dragon-pair close by, evaluating what it should think of them.

E-e-kTT softly called for Hiccup and extended a paw in invitation, exuding relaxed confidence. Hiccup was less so, clamoring onto Toothless's back and resting his chin on the black dragon's head. He still remembered the kick that left his Toothless-half-beloved hurting and stunned even if he hadn't felt it himself. He rumbled his uncertainty and wariness against Toothless as he tried to decide what to do. The hh-rrsss had dangerous rocks for paws and was not afraid to fight a dragon even like Toothless who was equally big in body alone never mind wings also, so if it chose to attack or that he was a threat, he knew it could become a huge danger.

Wary big horse threat possibly safe you think maybe?

Unsure maybe safe could be Toothless returned, but he couldn't know for certain. The only good interaction he'd had had been with a cage between him and it. Cautious investigate maybe safe we us.

Hiccup nodded, and staying on Toothless's back, they crept closer hesitantly, ready to leap back or away if it became threatening. The hh-rrsss shifted uneasily and eyed them with large eyes that were a contrast of dark and white, flaring its nose and looking tense. E-e-kTT crooned reassuring sounds at it and grabbed a hold of leather pieces tangled around its head, standing partially between them and it. There was a motion at his eyes before E-e-kTT blew softly into its nose.

Hiccup perched higher with his paws on Toothless's head and craned upwards, blowing their shared scent at its nose like E-e-kTT showed him to do. Even closer like this, it had one of the biggest flared noses he'd ever seen and it looked like it would be very soft. Just as he would not trust a pfikingr to touch Toothless though, he wasn't sure he felt comfortable being bold enough to try the same, and there was also the matter that it might bite with strong teeth or kick out.

The hh-rrsss angled its ears and stepped back undecidedly, still contemplating how it wanted to view the two of them, but at the very least it didn't appear afraid or ready to lash out. After a short while, it stepped closer, acting equally as cautious of them as they were of it, but its confidence was growing as was its curiosity,

inhaling both of their scents. Eventually it was close enough that a snort blew Hiccup's fur away from his face.

It was a little too close for comfort, and Hiccup moved to push its nose away as he was also pulling back, and found that indeed its nose was very soft. One of the softest things his paws had ever touched, softer than even the softest rabbit fur from baby hares, and he cooed his surprise and pleasantries at the velvet sensation.

After a moment, the hh-rrsss pulled away and yawned at the air, angling its ears back and fluttering tired eyes. E-e-kTT gave it another pat on the shoulder and it turned away to return to where it was before. E-e-kTT yawning in turn indicated he would be soon to follow, pushing a paw under the crow's chest to perch there instead of on the spring, though it was quick to pick his shoulder instead. The blue-eyed male regarded them for a moment and made a noise Hiccup vaguely recognized as a good night sound before heading for his own nest of furs.

They crooned back a dragon's good night sound and settled down, but not to sleep themselves, instead only relaxing and waiting and watching as the pfikingr all went about readying for sleep. They had to wait for a while into the night, but it would be worth it. The spring was a good toy, but he wanted to get his paws on an even better one.

* * *

><p>AN:** The spring idea actually came after I dismantled a spiral notebook that had a really sturdy plastic/metal spiral spring that I was randomly messing around with out of boredom and I thought to myself "this is something Hiccup would probably find to be a fun toy" =w= Only explanation for that part of this chapter~

17. Chapter 17

A/N: I meant to get this written out a lot faster than this but life and depression's been hitting me pretty hard.

The idea for the first part of this chapter actually came by way of Le'letha herself c: Also I've been watching way too much of History's "Vikings" and that's probably going to leak a lot more into my writing at times lol

* * *

><p>Learning from the Masters
A How To Train Your Dragon Fanfic
>Based off of Le'letha's "Nightfall"

* * *

><p>The first thing Alekt becomes aware of in the half-light of morning is familiar to him. It's to the nibbling beak of his little crow companion, Arvaken, letting him know it's time to start getting up by preening his hairline. He hums acknowledgment and lazily reaches a hand up to scratch behind her head, and she leans to whatever angle feels best.<p>

She croaks a pleased sound that he can interpret as something like _right there_ and _good spot, feels good_. He hums again, indulging her with a light scratch of fingertips and nail, not even bothering to open his eyes, warbling a groggy _love you_ sound. His arm still hurt from when he fell during the first test-flight, bothering him with its ache no matter what position he chose. It was really more of an annoyance than anything, and he knew at least that it wasn't broken, but sprained was still bad enough for his tastes.

Not that there was anything to do about it except for let it heal. It wasn't as if it was the worst wound he had lived through, but it would make re-crafting the wings difficult, and trying to fly again regardless would have to wait.

At the very least, most of the repair work that would absolutely _have_ to be done was the one wing frame, but already his mind was diligently working to think up modifications, namely two things: adding a tail for better control, and making the wings such that he could fold them in without sacrificing strength and stability. The tail would be the easier part. The wings... he'd cross that bridge when he came to it.

Overactive calculation aside, the morning was lazy, and he couldn't be bothered with getting up so damn early when he was so comfortably curled up amongst soft furs and wool blankets. Apparently neither could Arvaken, since the crow shuffled closer and rested her chest against his throat, contently chattering.

Of course, if he had plans for the morning and relaxing, _Tt-(click)-th-uhp-ss_ had something entirely different in mind, of which the first warning was a sound like an onslaught of rain droplets suddenly disturbed from a branch, followed closely by a quite clearly professed "_What in Thor's name_?"

He silently wondered if it was even worth opening his eyes to look or who had caused the outburst and who had spoken it. He breathed out a quiet sigh through his nose and cracked an eye open when he heard several more droplets hit stone much closer to himself, it taking a moment for him to focus on colored spots that freckled the cave floor.

That may have puzzled him, if not for knowing already what they were and where they'd come from (and more specifically, _who_ had probably gotten into them). With a quiet sigh, he peeled back part of his blankets, glancing upwards. Sure enough.

(click)-uhp and _Tt-th-ss_ chirped at him from the air with far too much of an amused sound, before _Tt-th-ss_ whipped fully around mid-air and sent drops flying from a painted tail fin. Alekt only flinched when a few of the drops hit his face, otherwise not reacting even as the Fury thrummed a sound of laughter deep in his throat. Arvaken was far less amused, pointedly hopping several paces away and croaking irritation, feathers fluffing.

Alekt's own lack of reaction didn't seem to deter them, flying to the far side and landing on one of the empty cages, where they were making sure _Tt-th-ss_ thoroughly coated his tailfin again before taking off. _(click)-uhp_ had something as well in-hand, which he flung and pelted one of the other men with who wasn't yet awake. Or at least, not before now, and they were none too happy.

"What in Hel is going on now?"

"Looks as though our scaled friends there have declared their own brand of war," Alekt hummed, wiping spots off his face with the back of his hand.

"Oh, I'll give 'em a war," someone grumbled, picking up the object `_(click)-uhp_` had thrown first (Alekt noted it looked like a clump of paint-soaked moss) and marching towards the airborne Fury and rider, hurling it. Rather than give any kind of indication that they should stop, they dipped underneath the toss and `_(click)-uhp_` yelped his own mocking sound, returning his own projectile paint.

It missed its intended target, or at least what Alekt assumed was the intended target, and hit someone else behind him, who sputtered in outrage.

Clearly, this was quickly going to go south.

It very quickly turns into a full spectacle.

The next hurled moss ball didn't go as intended, `_Tt-th-ss_` whipping around in the air and hitting it back at the same person who threw it, before both he and `_(click)-uhp_` landed on stone with the human-half of the pair throwing a moss ball from one hand and tossing the other for his dragon-half to bat at Alekt's men with a well-swung tail, both in rapid succession.

Anyone who had still been asleep wasn't for much longer.

One person sputtered and hacked, and Alekt guessed the guy must have inhaled one. There was much cursing and shouting from a few men. One man sat up and blinked in blatant confusion, wiping paint off before deciding even this was too much to bother with and rolled back over to go back to bed. A side-swung ax went flying, which both Fury and feral man darted out of the way of, and offensively sent an entire small bucket of wet paint back that `_(click)-uhp_` hurled, along with a screech that rang clear disapproval. There wasn't a surface anywhere that the resulting splatter didn't reach (unforeseen incidents like this are exactly why Alekt keeps his drawn plans tucked somewhere safe from getting ruined). Healing dragons were roused and some pelted by return-fire of paint-soaked moss. The one Gronkle among them snarled surprised annoyance and hacked up a fireball that sent two men throwing themselves aside.

It's all pure chaos, and the Fury pair look like they're having far too much fun with it. They've both perched themselves on the tops of the empty cages, hopping between them as moss balls and other objects - among them Alekt sees a flagon, a shoe, a few rocks, at one point someone throws a shield like a disc... - are thrown in their direction.

Mostly they're missed or barely nicked. One particularly lucky throw saw an explosion of blue across `_(click)-uhp_'s` entire face, which Alekt saw and heard `_Tt-th-ss_` pause and vocalize a throaty laugh at him, before raising a wing to shield himself from moss balls coming for him now, which ends up leaving a good half of one wing largely spotted with a menagerie of colors.

Alekt notices _(click)-uhp_ gathering up a new pile of moss balls while an outstretched wing shields him and Tt-th-ss_ both, chattering noises all but indiscernible. Within perhaps a minute, the dragon-man has almost more moss balls gathered up than he can hold bunched in both arms, tossing them up for the Fury to hit with his tail-fin and send a whole bunch flying at once.

That, of course, happens to be just when, through the cave entrance, the Stormcutter returns. Amused dragon laughs cut short mid-bark as a few bounce off _(click)-shhh-prrr_'s head, leaving it - too - streaked in a few extra colors it didn't have before.

There's a moment where nothing moves, not Viking nor dragon nor man who believes himself to be a dragon. The Stormcutter is hunched but rigid, looking like a poised statue, before it finally, quickly, snaps its head over at the Fury pair, who are trying increasingly hard not to look guilty.

It doesn't fool anyone, and with yelps answering a snarl, both dive behind empty cages out of sight as the Stormcutter lunges towards them, landing where they had been mere seconds before with a loud clang and searching for where they'd gone while other startled dragons scatter aside.

Fury appears with rider on its back, slinking low to the ground, almost enough so that Alekt swears he can almost hear belly-scales scraping stone, and they bolt for the cave entrance and open sky as soon as they both run out of cover behind a cage. He sees the black shape zip outside quick as a bolt of lightning, and the Stormcutter isn't far behind, screeching and scolding at their tail.

And just like that, the momentary chaos is over. No one is complaining about that, but almost everyone_ is complaining about a whole lot of other things, chief among them being woken before anyone was ready for it.

Alekt himself could have done with another hour or two of rest, but there's nothing to be done for it now, as he's too awake to get back to sleep even if he wants to. Yawning, he stood with a languid stretch, mindful not to rub at his eyes so as not to end up with paint in them and looking to find water to wash it away.

He is by far one of the luckier occupants of the cave when it comes to having been pelted with paint. He can't quite say that about many of the other men, some which seem to have gotten hit by a gratuitous amount of only one or two colors somehow, while others might as well be emulating a rainbow. Idly, he can't help but wonder if that's mere coincidence or entirely deliberate. It very well might be.

He noticed that Falas, his face scored by a couple of thin scars from their very first encounter with _(click)-uhp_, was sporting a great deal of yellow. Rodrik bore a heavy splattering of red and grey/silver shades. Viktor and Varjuna had mostly been hit by grey, maybe some green or blue here and there. Ingdrid had splashes of red and orange across him. Nikelas and Hartvig had been hit almost entirely with dark and light blues - as splattered his own face when Tt-th-ss_ flew over and woke him, though his seems to have come also with some gray. Everyone else seemed to have gotten splashed in too many colors to pin any one or two down.

Perhaps he was thinking too hard about it. Perhaps he wasn't and there was some message or reason for it. The dragon-man speaks as dragons do, but in trying to speak to humans, he is very limited. Limited by language barriers, certainly, but by no means stupid.

He doesn't say much of it, and doesn't think `_(click)-uhp_` would understand if he tried to convey it anyway, but he's seen the sharpness in those eyes and something of a glassy look, not of dimness but of thoughts constantly at work, not only taking things in but thinking of things maybe not in-front of him right that moment or ideas that can't be put into a tangible form.

It's the same look he sees of divided but intense concentration when the boat-builder back home is toying with some new design to make ships that are faster or stronger or can carry more without sacrificing efficiency in anything else, or the calculating, twitching glances that Arvaken performs when she's trying to figure out a complex puzzle, seeing it from all angles and then completing it once its all been worked out in her head. He's sure its the same look he gets when he's working on his wing designs too.

The mental clockwork is always in motion, but still ever aware of where he is, among humans whose neutrality might be fleeting at best. Alekt personally has no qualms with the dragons, but by the grumbling that continues well into mid-morning, he can solidly claim that only for himself and Hartvig.

By then, he still hasn't seen hide nor scale of the Fury-pair or the Stormcutter return. He highly doubts that the larger dragon did any kind of lasting damage to them, nor did anything like eat them (though he's sure many of the men would prefer it right now), but he can't help thinking its probably better they aren't here now.

"Damn beasts... remind me again why we haven't put a sword through one of 'em yet?"

Alekt understands that part of it is merely grumpiness from the rude awakening, but he still sees it as worth addressing. "Because they're helping me to achieve what we set out to do in the first place. Unless of course you have a problem with how I do things, but that would be something to address to me first."

"And what was stoppin' us from doing it some other way before this crazy wild-man came along? Not as if anything is much different now. The plan hasn't changed none, far as I can tell."

Alekt pondered a moment as he sat down. "Before I answer that, let me ask you a question of my own," he hummed. "Purely hypothetical. Let's say that, one day, you come across a dragon, and it attacks you, probably for food or something or other. What would you do?"

"Well that's simple. I'd kill it."

"The obvious choice," Alekt acknowledged. "So let's say that this happens... a dragon appears and attacks. You kill it. The dragon no longer poses a threat. Some time later, a ship comes from the horizon. This ship is large and full of Vikings from another tribe, with no intention of peace or negotiations or truces. They come to raid, to take weapons and food and to kill your village. The choice here is as obvious as it was with the dragon: you fight and kill

them."

He was met with a chorus of `Aye`s.

"However, let's imagine for a moment that you are not victorious. The raiders come, they fight, just as you do, and they win. They take your livestock, your crops, burn your homes, and kill your families. If not this enemy, these raiders, then the ones after them. There is always a more powerful tribe or country."

He was met with another slew of voices, all disagreeing, boasting their battle prowess and the strength of their village and people.

"However," Alekt began sharply, silencing the men around him. "Let's think of another scenario, much the same. A dragon attacks, you fight it, but the dragon flees before you can deliver the killing blow, or, in a moment of weakness or oversight, let it escape. The dragon gets away and flies, far over the horizon, and perhaps just within sight or just out of it, the dragon finds this same ship of raiders. Maybe it flies over them... maybe the raiders chase and trap it... maybe the dragon sinks the boat. Regardless, the ship veers away, never finds you or your village, or perhaps they sink, or are too battered by the time they reach the shore to put up a proper fight. You win to fight another day and your village survives... all because you let a dragon live."

He wasn't met with agreements, but neither did he get another chorus of disagreements, all laced with utmost conviction like before.

"It's all just hypotheticals though," someone finally shrugged. "And what's that got to do with what we're doing here anyway?"

"It's all relative," Alekt answered simply. "It can't ever quite be fathomed just what ripples the smallest of actions will cause, and how many of those ripples will become like the high waves of a storm. There's no telling exactly what the involvement of the Night Fury and dragon-man will lead to, but there is much more possibility to be gained by collaboration. More flies with honey and all that."

Someone scoffs. "And what do we have to show for it? A rude awakening, a face-full of paint, one of our own dead! And for what?"

"For progress."

To him, personally, it's simple. Without much thought at all, he can see things not only for what they are, but what they could have been for ill, and what they could be for better. The plans he had been working to draw up for the wings had required him to catch dragons and take their measurements, and that was made much easier and faster with _Tt-(click)-th-uhp-ss_ able to communicate so fluently.

"Do you think that other tribes and other countries across the ocean who see our peoples, yours especially, as enemies merely sit idly by, cowering like hares in a warren until the raids in the next spring and the spring after that? They make preparations, construct new ways of fighting and killing. The peoples who keep innovating better than

their foes are the ones who thrive, and the ones who stop die out."

"We've seemed to fair well enough," Rodrik grunts, unperturbed, and perhaps looking a touch insulted. By what, Alekt can only guess is the idea that a tool considered ludicrous can be more use in a battle than the age-old stubbornness and tenacity of Vikings. As far as Alekt sees, they need both - or rather, they would do better to have both.

"Before the raids, none in Norge knew of weapons such as crossbows that the Franks use, but I think none would argue at the usefulness and power of one. Now imagine the reverse. Vikings with wings, able to overcome any obstacle, to pass over mountains in only a day or two where others would have to march by foot for days if not weeks. Going over walls where before entire battlements might have to be built, or ladders tall enough made, or grappling hooks thrown, and the dangers of scaling up the walls before boulders or hot oil or arrows could be loosed, or the line broken to have a man fall to his death. And sure, enemies might get some as spoils of war eventually, but they will not have had the experience and teaching of dragons, who live as much in the air as on the ground, who view us as friends instead of something to eat and kill."

He can see some of the men imagining, playing with the ideas in their heads, some with blossoming realization of just how _critical_ such an invention could be, how much easier it could make their lives and bring with it better prizes. Raids on other tribes was something old and familiar and almost effortless at times, but there were alliances being forged and prizes out beyond the sea, beyond walls around cities they had never before even imagined existing until recent decades, with weapons they had never before imagined.

"Cooperation is how your tribes and my clan came together to begin with, after hundreds of years of bloodshed and rivalry, and I think we can agree that it has been to the benefit of both groups to ally. The same can be said for doing as much with other species as well, like dragons, or crows." He pointedly scratched behind Arvaken's head and between her shoulders, though she seemed more interested in picking scraps of breakfast from his plate at the moment.

"Our enemies will not wait to counter us with newer, deadlier tactics, so we must not hesitate to take risks and create our own. Often the best weapons are the ones no one else thought of - and that will make it all the more crucial to accomplish. And, though I make no assumption it will come to pass, if the dragons come to see us as allies enough to aid us in our survival and our fights, then all the better."

* * *

><p>A full day goes by where the Fury-pair are nowhere to be seen. Alekt wonders if that's deliberate, strategically finding somewhere to lie low until their morning disruption blows over. Probably a wise choice to give his Viking crew a wide berth. Simultaneously he wonders if humans are the only thing they're hiding from for the moment.<p>

He doesn't think they've gone for good, especially not with the dragons they rescued from other trappers still recovering here

(dragons which he's recognized as a Gronkle, Timberjack, Thunderdrum, and Snaptrapper respectively). His arm isn't completely recovered yet, lifting anything with real weight to it still makes it strain sharply, but its getting better. In a day or two he should be able to resume as normal.

Many of the days as of late had been about work and seeing things done, but there was nothing besides daily tasks of gathering fresh water and food from fish nets or traps that he could think of anyone to do, so he bade Hartvig give everyone leave to do as they pleased, so long as they did nothing to raise a hand or an axe to any of the dragons.

Himself, he went about carving another wing frame for the one that had snapped and boiling and setting it to a shape, while some slept, others practiced their blade skills or tested their strength against each other, and others ate or drank and sang boisterously, one song after another. After he had spent some time working and getting the wing frame as he wanted it, he decided he'd work on it elsewhere, working on tacking up Sangrida and muttering the lyrics of another tune the men were repeating from many other past choruses.

```
_ "Spring has come this mor'n'  
><em>_ 'Over docks we rush and huddle'  
> 'Eager eyes and pounding boards'<br> 'As we prepare to sail for  
trouble" _
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_ "Shields flanked, sails drawn, Avast!'  
> 'The winds be catching fast"<em>
```

He went about checking all Sangrida's hooves for stones that would make her lame and that they hadn't grown too long for the same reasons. No need for a trimming yet, though soon he would have to round some sharper edges forming from being worn against stone to keep her from growing sore.

```
_ "Seas smack against the shore'  
> 'Angry gods leave Men befuddled'<br> __ 'Sparks flash from ye hammer  
of Thor'  
> 'For must Mortal have done muddled"<em>
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```
_ "Hold tight, be humbled, Aghast!'  
> 'The storm, her furies lash"<em>
```

Lifting up the saddle was a little more strenuous than he'd been counting on, what with his arm still a bit sprained. He pondered for a moment going bareback instead, but he planned on doing some more work with the wings wherever he ended up stopped, and only had so many hands to hold on with. In the end, he settled on saddling, trying to keep most of the weight as he hefted it over Sangrida's shoulders on his uninjured arm.

```
_ "The ship the seas have gored'  
> 'Weaving ropes and lines a 'jumble'<br> 'Canvas tattered 'til no more'  
  
> 'On weary sea-legs some a 'tumble"<em>
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```
_ "Lands sighted afar, At Last!  
> 'Lands raided recent and past"<em>
```


Sangrida of course - as the way of most horses - doesn't want her saddle synched, taking in a good, deep breath of air and holding as much of it as possible. He's been through this many times and they've built up a routine. Sangrida can be coerced a little easier than most horses, but it takes bribing. He already has the oats in hand by the time they get to this part, catching her eye and her nose. She's a clever animal, and tries to get it with no strings attached, turning for it, but Alekt has done this just as many times as she, and he indicates what he wants with a light tug of the synch on her saddle.

_ "For spoils of war we roar"
> 'Against those who call us savage'
 'We leap and rush ashore'

> 'For silver and gold we ravage'

Sangrida huffs out a complaint, but likewise compliance, letting him tighten up the strap so that the saddle won't flip while he's in it, and she gets her reward. While she's munching away loudly enough to almost match the song's volume, he's securing his dismantled winged device to her saddlebags, and notices a flicker of black just above the entrance of the cave.

_ "Shields up, for glory, Attack!"
> 'The gods are at our backs'

A sleek midnight head and mirroring pink with auburn hair peeks down over the lip of the entrance from a cleft above, partly upside down and curious. Alekt wonders how long they've been near and watching.

_ "Blades drawn, blood spilt, We Laugh!"
> 'Victory firmly in our grasp!'

Grasping Sangrida's reigns, he led her out to the start of the ravine, glancing up and over his shoulder at the Fury and rider, whistling a sound that the two make to form questions.

"Been here?" He keeps it short and concise, motioning with his hand to the cliffs to signify _here?_ He finds that keeping things short and to only a few simple words and leaving the rest that would normally be spoken up to interpretation is better. Too many words, often not understood, only seems to further confuse the meaning. But there is enough cleverness there to fill in the gaps that get left silent.

"Isss," _(click)-uhp_ answers immediately, thrumming and chattering some other sounds and subtle motions that Alekt loosely interprets as having been lurking and listening and watching from outside but not for the whole time. Beyond that, it's none of his business where the two have gone, so he doesn't ask, instead swinging up into the saddle while another song starts wafting up from inside.

He can see that _Tt-(click)-th-uhp-ss_ are curious as they slink down the rocks and peek inside, chirping in wonder at what could be the cause of such collective loudness (which has driven all but the deaf Thunderdrum out of the cave to linger on some low cliffs by the ravine), but they at least don't seem to take the noise as something dangerous or negative far as he can tell.

"Song," he explains simply. "Words and sounds that are good, that humans speak together, or sometimes alone. It makes humans happy. They feel good inside." He knows they understand _good_ and _humans_. He thinks maybe they understand _happy_ and _words_. He explains those in vocals and that the _good happy words_ are a thing _inside_, a heartfelt thing, with a deft motion to his own chest. "Dragons must have songs too, yes?"

He sees them thinking about it, interpreting the question and glancing to each other, and answer with a unison sound and a questioning whistle. He knows it as a song as animals know it and nods. Of course dragons have their own songs. Really it was more rhetorical on his part, but he knows that dragons probably have a different idea of what constitutes a song than humans do, just as the songs of birds and of dogs are different, singing in chirps and chatters and howls.

"Song. Together-sounds. Good sounds. You understand?"

"Isss," _(click)-uhp_ hums, experimentally rolling out the sound in his own draconic way as "_S-nnnK_".

"So dragons have songs. They must also know how to race, yes?" The words are lost, but they know its a question, and he indicates the meaning of the words with bundling up Sangrida's reigns, the tension in his body silently indicating what he wants to her, and he can feel her bunch beneath him, coiled and ready to spring at the first word. The mare knows the precursor to a race - its in the blood of horses, to do it. Often he sees horses in different paddocks entirely race back and forth flanking their fences even - and she snorts and paws the stone, trembling with _excitement_ and _expectation_ and _Challenge!_

They seem to catch the hint, picking their way across the rocks and pondering it inquisitively. _Tt-th-ss_ perks the flaps on his head Alekt thinks of as ears, chirring to his companion and receiving similar sounds in return as they contemplate what they want to do, which takes little guess-work to figure out what they will decide. It doesn't take long to decide, the two of them seeing the game in it and biting the bait.

Seeing their choice, Alekt gives the indicating nudge with his heel, briefly voicing to Sangrida the trigger word for her fastest, wildest sprint, and held on tightly as she bolted from a stand-still so fast it would have left the unprepared hanging in mid-air. The Fury-pair are not long in leaping after across the higher rocks, scrambling over them with agile ease in light bounds and long leaps.

He doesn't spend a great deal of time focusing in on them, instead arching into the curve of Sangrida's shoulders and neck as she races through the ravine at a breakneck pace. There are no outstretched wings nor rivers of air currents nor horizons far as the eye can see, but this is its own kind of flying. Mane whips back against his chest and face, air tangibly rattling from mare's nose-to-chest in a dull roar, a whuffing like bellows at the smith unleashing all their breath in one heave of many men all piling onto the handle and embers coming to life, as if she were a dragon herself.

Better even then that - he thinks (though he is sure the dragon-man might disagree) - for she is an animal that would fight spear and

sword and strike fear into dragons themselves, a warhorse as excellent as they come. He knows the Fury and rider are at their tail, but there is no fear in her as there might be with others, only exhilaration and adrenaline, the readiness of a fight if it comes to that and just as much willingness to leave them well in the wake of the dusk she kicks up, proud as she is fast and intelligent enough to know the difference in victory for its own sake.

They clear the ravine and into the woods, stone becoming soft earth under-hoof, and he catches and mirrors her glance at the dragon-pair springing down the rocks and still matching pace only one or two bounds behind. He knows her thoughts without needing a sound between them, watching the flick of her eyes and feeling the shift in her steps before she kicks out. It's a miss - she knows where they are and how far to aim, she meant to miss - but the screech of indignation is good enough reason, Alekt catching the dirty look that both send in his and Sangrida's way.

It's not without its repercussion, a whistle announcing one of those bolts Night Fury's are famed for, which whistles clear past either him or Sangrida but explodes bark shrapnel off the face of a tree just a short ways ahead, close enough still to make her falter aside and slow for a few steps. It makes up for the distance they had to back off when Sangrida kicked back at them earlier. The two make no secret of their retaliation or the deliberate miss with throaty houghs of laughter.

It's a sort of game that he and his own mount started, but two can play that game and he by no means plans on letting them be the ones to finish it. Crows may be very private about what they communicate and what goes on in their heads, but they are far from above pulling a good trick or two.

He lets Sangrida lead their path, giving her free reign and observing the space as they go, thundering through the brush and the ferns wherever seems most advantageous and safe. He spies another opportunity and bundles the reigns back for a sharp turn and leans, just enough to indicate the direction he wants. Sangrida catches his hint and they sharply come around a tree, almost so close as to be wrapped around its trunk.

The small branch that snaps back after they pass elicits an all-too-human yelp at their tail. Sangrida slows to a quick prance and glances back with humor in her eyes, thinking it a good trick and whinnying laughter while _(click)-uhp_ rolls off his shoulder atop _Tt-th-ss_'s rump, crawling back towards the saddle on the Fury's shoulders. Sangrida doesn't linger long, leaping at the first nudge to her ribs back on her path before they can fully regroup and launch another counter-attack, which Alekt knows is coming sooner or later.

He keeps a lookout in the corner of his eye as they run through the brush, Sangrida starting to get a bit winded, bunching in preparation when she leaps a log and continues on. It isn't long before the Fury is behind and above them, trying to fly in his blind spot to catch up. He thinks maybe that's cheating a bit, but then again they might argue that so was a drawn branch let to smack at their faces, even if the hit wasn't solid.

They drop down - he hears the _thump_ of the Fury landing on the

earth - and soon enough they're flanking him and Sangrida from several feet to one side, working double-time to take the lead ahead. When they manage it, they abruptly swipe in from the side and a large black wing snaps out in front of them, doing a great deal to block the view of where they're headed and making Sangrida slow and try to get around it.

When she veers, so do they, and only a few times do incoming trees and rocks and other things force them to break away from their attempts to impede Alekt's and Sangrida's progress before returning to it immediately. Their efforts finally bare some fruit when a log comes into the path, the two of them leaping over it. With so little time to see it, Sangrida can only skid to a halt, throwing him forward into the dirt.

Were he more of a hot-blooded person, he might have been angry. As it stands, he sees it for what it is. A good trick.

The two of them thrum amusement from the far side of the path, staying a safe enough distance that they could flee before he could reach them for another bout of revenge. If they continue on, something might turn into less than a game though, either that they'll take something as a threat or someone will get an untimely injury (he's probably lucky there was nothing to hit his head or fall on when he was thrown this time), so he decides to call it a tie for now and clicks his tongue for Sangrida to hop over the log, the mare having waited and watched for him to be out of the way of her landing before proceeding.

"That makes us even then." Words he's not entirely sure are understood, but it does appear they have the idea all on their own merit, or perhaps even consider it a victory by their triumphant expressions and a pleased purr, as he stands and dusts himself off before grasping Sangrida's reigns and walking in the lead of her. They take the initiative to go ahead of him, still preferring their berth of space, until all come to a glade of tall grasses.

Letting go of Sangrida's reigns, Alekt untied his wings and other various odds and ends to work on them from her saddle, choosing a seat on a mossy stone. Hopefully, this time, the wings he made would fare even better than the last ones, especially with some additions he had in mind.

End
file.